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VOLTAIRE

VOLUME ONE

VOLTAIRE

(From a Drawing Made About 1790)

VOLTAIRE

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BY GEORG BRANDES

2 VOLUMES IN 1

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TRANSLATION BY
OTTO KRUGER
AND
PIERCE BUTLER

I

OVERTURE

1

Some writers are of importance in literary history. The greatest, mark epochs in the literature of their country.

A very small number, at most a few dozen, are important in world history.

Voltaire is one of these.

* * *

Once upon a time a bundle of nerves, charged with electricity, captivated Europe and enlightened it.

Once upon a time there was a man who was regarded as the supreme embodiment of human wit while still young, and who retains this reputation even to this day.

Once there was a demon whose intellect was fire and whose ideas were lightning, whose heart was warm in devotion and friendship, while his mind shone cold and clear as a northern light. The art of his natural simple eloquence has rarely been equalled and never surpassed. It was conversational, not oratorical; he never made speeches.

Once upon a time there was a man of the world, a business man, a courtier, a landowner, a poet, a scientist, a historian, a hermit, whose nature was will, whose desire was honor, whose ambition was action, whose manner was charm, whose support was a rare memory, whose intellect was a genial vigilance, whose commendation, meaning distinction, was sought as eagerly by Pope as by actress, by King as by poet, and whose mockery left a stigma for centuries.

Before his time only Marcus Tullius Cicero held such a central position in Europe's literature; Vol-

taire therefore looked back at Cicero admiringly, as at a model, and his favorite rôle was that of Cicero, in his own play, *Rome Sauvée*. Nevertheless, Cicero did not compare with him in wit and vigorous satire.

As a satirist famed in all courts and in all circles he had a predecessor; Pietro Aretino, equally dreaded and equally wooed.

But while Aretino was a pamphleteer—at times obscene, at times sanctimonious—with tribute and luxury as his only aim, so that posterity speaks of him with nothing but contempt, Voltaire's glory after death is far greater than during his life.

By his avid intellectual curiosity and inexhaustible inventive faculty, by his dynamic energy, he accomplished nothing less than embodying a nation, a continent and a century.

Goethe, at first Voltaire's opponent and, later, his admirer, said of him that he was French like no other Frenchman, even called him "the first outstanding writer in France, the one who corresponds best to the nation." And in our own day two of Voltaire's uncompromising opponents among French critics, his opposite, Brunetière, and his hater, Faguet, said the same: No name is more French, none reflects better the French nature.

Thus, Voltaire summarizes a nation.

And, likewise, a century. The eighteenth century is, in truth, Voltaire's century.

Finally, Voltaire summarizes a continent—even more than a continent. For in the territory of the mind he made conquests, like Alexander and Napoleon in the outer world, and by intellectual means reigned as unquestionably as they. And his reign has proven to be far more lasting. For, there are still Voltairians. But where today is one to find an adherent of Alexander or Bonaparte?

Voltairianism represents a new reformation two hundred years after Calvin and Luther. A proclamation of freedom of research (deceptive, because it stopped at the Bible) was first issued in France in Voltaire's time, and spread from France all over the earth.

2

No one has been so maligned as Voltaire. Few important personalities have served as a battleground for more stubborn quarrelling.

Lessing, who spiritually had been his disciple, and humanly had been guilty of a minor offense against him—seldom excused by the guilty—wrote after Voltaire's death the following epitaph:

> Hier liegt—wenn man euch glauben wollte,
> Ihr frommen Herrn!—der längst hier liegen sollte.
> Der liebe Gott verzeih aus Gnade
> Ihm seine Henriade
> Und seine Trauerspiele
> Und seine Verschen viele:
> Denn was er sonst an's Licht gebracht,
> Das hat er ziemlich gut gemacht.

Voltaire, who highly esteemed Pope, was in turn greatly esteemed by Byron, sincere admirer of Pope. In *Childe Harold* the poet composed these lines to his memory:

> The one was fire and fickleness, a child,
> Most mutable in wishes, but in mind
> A wit as various—gay—grave—sage—as wild—
> Historian, bard, philosopher, combined;
> He multiplied himself among mankind.
> The Proteus of their talents: But his own
> Breathed most in redicule,—which, as the wind
> Blew where it listed, laying all things prone,—
> Now to o'erthrow a fool, and now to shake a throne.

In Germany, Wieland was a poet in Voltaire's spirit and therefore liked by the Göttingen poets, the German romantics, who embody the reaction against the philosophy of the eighteenth century, were far more hostile to Voltaire than Lessing had been.

3

Voltaire came from a country and lived in an age in which the intelligence of the best educated was refined, while political and social conditions were bar-

baric. As a writer he was therefore outlawed. As a satirist and reform-writer he was put in the Bastille repeatedly and all through his life was in constant fear of being jailed.

For that reason, the most famous man of French literature spent comparatively few years of his life in Paris, where his stay was either forbidden or too dangerous. Even at the age of eighty-three years, when, after twenty-eight years' absence, he dared to set foot in the French capitol, Louis XVI would have liked to have him arrested, and had him advised to disappear as quickly as possible—advice made unnecessary by his death.

Thus, Voltaire spent his days in exile, either on foreign soil—in England, Holland, Prussia, Switzerland—or as near as possible to the borders of France —in Cirey, Ferney—whence he could flee at a moment's notice.

In this outlawed situation, he wrote almost always anonymously. Indeed, this did not by any means protect him since his style was known; and besides, much was ascribed to him that he had not written at all. Thus, for his safety's sake, he disowned his writings again and again, lied about being responsible for them, and not a few he permitted to remain unprinted for an age. When they were published it was seldom at his instigation.

Nearly all his writings met with the same fate; their sale was forbidden.

Several of his most valuable works, as the *Philosophic Letters* on England, were burned by the hangman. He worked unceasingly, but in constant fear of being robbed of his freedom.

Nevertheless, when about forty years old, he was hailed by the most powerful and gifted men and women of his time—by Kings, Empresses, aristocrats and soldiers, by thinkers, poets, and by the scientists of the age, as their spiritual leader.

Finally, respect for him became so pronounced that the most prominent in the field of literature, the highest society of all countries, saw in him not only the most famous and renowned writer of the age, but also a personality which exemplified liberalism

and toleration, high humanitarianism and abhorrence of cruelty: to the extent that a man like Franklin, the champion not only of the new North America, but also of freedom of the people, inventive faculty, theoretical understanding and practical sense, brought his grandson to him and asked for his blessing. Voltaire said: "God and Liberty!"

Men and women of his time were fired by the rays of his brilliant intellect. Not a few of the most cultured openly worshipped.

Innumerable letters to Voltaire show the ardor and gratitude of their devotion. Typical, for instance, are the first letters of Frederick the Great, written when he was Crown Prince.

On the other hand, to those who clung to old-fashioned piety and to the die-hard conservatives, and above all to the dull, Voltaire was the mocker and destroyer. To the superstitious, he was the devil. To the malicious and the envious, he was the object of hatred and slander.

During his long life he gave to one generation after another the consciousness of right and the strength of reason. Never was he himself cold when he thought he had detected some truth. It flamed up in him, and he threw it into the remotest spaces, now like the beam from a lighthouse, now like a grenade from a mortar, now like the transmission of electrical energy in charged cells.

As Condorcet observed: For him the truth was no secret to be whispered among the initiate. To him it was like food prepared freshly and in the most appetizing manner; or like medicine which, not to be refused, should please the palate; a banner to be raised, a watchword to be called.

His greatest work of art is no one of the numerous tasks completed during his life, but his life itself.

This life has many stages of development, many more than that of the insect, which at first is larva, then pupa, and finally butterfly. The insect has ugly moments. There is nothing nice about a larva. But Voltaire's life has this rare thing in common with the insect to which Psyche has given wings—that its last phase is the most wonderful.

Voltaire, at first fashionable poet, playwright and wit, in the view of his time something like a national poet, began on English soil to turn into an enlightener, awakener of ideas, reformer, implacable foe of obsolete prejudice and long-established abuses. In the course of time, he emerged as historian, naturalist, lyricist, dramatist, novelist, political economist, philosopher, agitator. The most brilliant point in Voltaire's metamorphosis is reached when the game-cock turns into the commander-in-chief, the wag becomes the scientist, the homeless, aimlessly roaming courtier develops into the responsible patriarch, the settled lord and benefactor of a whole region. At that time he took a bold and aggressive stand against fanaticism and everything else that stood in the way of right and justice. He became a protector of the oppressed and maltreated—a figure never to be forgotten.

The satyr was transformed into Pan.

Voltaire's spirit is universal. His sane and practical knowledge included even sanitary regimen and serum treatment. He plead for cleanliness, proposed the establishment of public baths. He was the first to teach man the pollution caused by cemeteries inside a city or church, letting the dead slaughter the living. And in France he was the first to recommend vaccination against small-pox. On top of this, this same man was the first Frenchman who was not satisfied to ask himself the most vital intellectual questions, but even answered them. Is the Christian tradition historically true? Is the Christian doctrine inspired by God and intellectually probable? Without hesitation he answered: the tradition is full of fables and improbabilities; the Church is the first evidence of a decline from the higher civilization of heathen antiquity. Its doctrine is incomplete at its best, a gloomy and tyrannical superstition at its worst.

4

It is true that in the Europe of the eighteenth century France was next to England in enlightenment.

Judged by modern standards, however, this enlightenment was a dreadful barbarity, far worse than that of Russia during Czardom. The penal laws were in chaos. New laws were passed revoking the old; they were often contradictory and always trickily and speciously phrased. Almost every disposition of the judge could be enforced and justified under some law. Hence the judge's power was unlimited.

Judiciary appointments were for sale. Children, incapable of administering their own affairs—hardly out of school—were given the arbitrary power of making or breaking full grown men and women within their jurisdiction.

La Bruyère, in the fourteenth chapter of his book *Les Charactères,* says: "The judge's duty is to practice justice, his profession is to strain it." Had they only been content to stop at that!

Attorneys in the provinces had farmers arrested on a trumped-up charge of theft or carrying arms, and held them prisoners until paid. Woe to him who had a judge for an enemy! The village-mayor of Puissieux sentenced a certain Carlier to be tortured and broken upon the wheel, just because he hated him. It was quite simple: Carlier owned a brick-yard. There was an assessor named Frillet who yearned for just such a brick-yard. It was not difficult to persuade Frillet to accuse Carlier of murder and to have him broken upon the wheel. Two men who protested Carlier's innocence were hanged for false testimony. When this matter had been disposed and the court had sentenced him to die, Louis XV commuted his sentence to ten years of exile in—Burgundy. Upon another judge who had forged documents a fine of fifteen francs was imposed.

La Bruyère says: It is not absolutely impossible for a man who has influential friends to lose a law-suit.

The old-French criminal law was summarized in the penal code of 1670. There was no general penal law. The judges could at any time dig out some old and inhuman decree. Even though the Danish law of 1683 was far from modern, it was many steps in advance of the French.

In the France of the eighteenth century was to be

found the same cruelty as existed two hundred years before. Stake and wheel were introduced from Germany in the time of Francis I, in 1535, as a deterrent to robbers and highwaymen, and this penalty (at that time) was scarcely too severe, since the robbers tortured their victims dreadfully. But later its use was not limited to punishing highway robbers.

There were five favorite methods of inflicting the death penalty: quartering, the stake, the wheel, the scaffold and the gallows. These five were variously combined in the punishment of the many kinds and degrees of crimes. Thieving, no matter how petty, was punishable by the gallows. A maid who had stolen a few napkins was hanged. It was the universal belief that the torture of the criminal was necessary to satisfy a demand, and the demand was of God, according to the conception of the time. Not only ecclesiastic, but also secular justice imposed punishment in the name of God. And the criminal had to do church-penance.

All power was in the hands of Church and King.

As late as the year 1780 a teacher of criminal law, Muyart de Vouglans, divides the crime of offending the Divine Majesty into three groups: the first contains: blasphemy, atheism, sorcery, witchcraft; the second: heresy, apostasy, schism; the third: desecration of holy things, i.e., desecration of churches, sacraments, graves, crucifixes, images of saints.

Since the Revocation of Edict of Nantes, Protestants in France had been outlaws. Louis XV, in 1724, forbade the Protestants to practise any other religion than the Roman Catholic or to gather at any other divine service.

Death at the stake was the penalty for sorcery, blasphemy, heresy, desecration of churches, incest, parricide, and homosexuality.

A sentence to the galleys for even a limited time was really a life sentence, for the prisoners were held after their time had expired. The galleys were the means of maintaining French naval power in the Mediterranean. The rowing benches had to be filled. When the suicides among the galley-slaves became too frequent, it was, at the time of Colbert, proposed

that some of those who had served their time be released. Sometimes if the convict had rich relatives, a Turkish slave might be bought from the Knights of Malta, as his substitute.

Life in the galleys was like this:

On twenty-five or thirty double benches sat three hundred rowers shackled five or six to an oar. Naked to the waist, they sat on the bench from which they were never unchained, winter or summer, day or night. They ate and slept on it. Moreover, they were constantly exposed to the cruelty of the keepers who, whip in hand, circulated among them.

Most cruel was the treatment of the Protestants who, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, were sentenced to the galleys. Their life was one of continuous torture Jeanne Pierre Espinas was sentenced for life to the galleys and was chained to one spot, half-naked, for twenty-three years, because he had given supper and a night's lodging to a Protestant clergyman.

Literature enjoyed no legal protection. Justice, the supreme distinction between right and wrong, was assumed to reside naturally in the King. The judges passed sentence because the King had delegated to them the power divinely his, and the law did not affect him in any way. His will was law and he had the right to break down every obstacle. Where no law had been violated, yet an arrest was desired, the one interested simply procured a *lettre de cachet*, a secret warrant countersigned by the secretary of state and bearing the royal seal. It ordered the person named in it to go to a certain prison or into exile, either abroad or in a certain town within the borders of France. The *lettres de cachet* robbed of their freedom persons who, like Voltaire, had done nothing for which any legal accusation could be lodged against them. There was no indictment, hence no trial. The victim stayed in prison or exile for an undetermined period. He could not clear himself, since he had not been accused.

After Damien's attack upon Louis XV the situation of literature was regulated by the law of 1757, as follows: any one against whom evidence was brought,

as author, creator, or even buyer, of writings attacking religion, disturbing the peacefully inclined or undermining the order and peace of the State, was sentenced to die. The same penalty was imposed upon pedlars of the writing. Furthermore, authors and distributers of printed matter, who did not follow the rules prescribed to the Press, were sentenced to the galleys.

A comparatively light penalty was the destruction of the printed matter; this was, at the demand of the prosecuting officer, torn to pieces and burned by the hangman.

It is no slight honor to have led the opposition against such legal conditions.

Voltaire's fight for a reform of the criminal law is the center of a movement which, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was launched against the old criminal code and which during the revolution led to its complete breakdown. This movement became widespread through the efforts of Voltaire. Wherever it was strategically important to declare war upon obsolete medieval forms, he appeared on the scene to assume the leadership.

Whoever wrote against the old legal system sought association with Voltaire and strove for his approval. Every one who was oppressed by the harshness of this system or by the distortion of justice resulting from it, saw in him his protector and savior. In the decade from his death to the outbreak of the revolution, the platform he advocated gains more and more powerful and more and more widespread support, but not a plank, not a doctrine is added. All keep within the limits of Voltaire's aims. All threads start from and lead back to him.

For, by numerous volumes, by hundreds of pamphlets, by ten thousand letters, he influenced, in every civilized country, the princes and princesses, the royal favorites and royal mistresses, the cardinals and abbés, the field marshals and officers. In fact, the whole writing public that developed after him was influenced by him and continued his work, even where it tried to disagree with him.

Diderot, perhaps the most prominent of his dis-

ciples, often irked by Voltaire's limitations as a deist and by the narrowness of his conception of good taste, wrote in the midst of his annoyance that all were so deeply indebted to him, that, whatever he might say or do, everything must be forgiven.

5

Voltaire was not made of the same stuff as those creatures of whom Paludan Müller writes in the introduction to his *Adam Homo*: "the unarmoured heroes with the naked throats." He is at the same time God and rogue, Zeus and Scapin. At his inmost core he is the mocker. When he is completely serious, bombast and pathos are far from him. He can gnash his teeth in exasperation, but he never declaims (in his own name). He does not thunder, he sneers. Literature is no longer an art but a weapon. He brandishes his weapon, his deadly power of mockery. He was in one sense an especially cunning and careful person, as John Morley said of him, too clever ever to throw away a shield. But he felt that once he had drawn his sword he could not, as long as he lived, put it back in its sheath, and though he did not (like Horatio) throw away his shield, he threw away his scabbard. The hiss and flash of his blade in its brilliant, cutting strokes inspired awe in those who encountered him.

Ambitious as Voltaire was and high as he raised himself above his class, he was not able to maintain his personal dignity as a writer. From the start he had literary opponents and enemies. He answered them too often, never let them out of his sight, but continued the feud to what seems a tiresome length to present-day readers. Thus against his will he made all of them immortal. Their names like choruses repeat themselves in hundreds of places in his work where one would think him occupied with anything else rather than with them.

His self-assertiveness never took aristocratic form. Constantly irritated and provoked, he could, with his touchy nervous system, his oversensitive temper and

his wasplike instinct, never resolve to let his opponents have the last word. Incessantly he searched for and took revenge, was at all times the warrior, unmerciful, sometimes cruel. As a rule, his assailants were malicious, small, unworthy, envious. They wanted to rise, earn glory and ingratiate themselves with the rulers of the Church, attacking him now from this, now from that ambush. Some of them were only haughty clerical pedants. But their attacks embittered him so much that he at times—unmindful of his fight for the freedom of speech—demanded for them the Bastille, the prison in Fort l'Evèque, even the galleys, and actually had one of them, as a penalty for libel, sent to the Bastille for some time.

Far as he was in advance of his time and its prejudices, he nevertheless possessed some of these prejudices. Again and again he who himself belonged to the middle-class insults his enemies with their inferior origin, and where it serves to expose them to ridicule and contempt, he does not mind departing from strict truth.

His habit, created by the reign of lawlessness in France, of denying the authorship of his works—and he denied at times almost all of them except the Henriade and the poems on the battle of Fontenoy—had an unfavorable effect on his character. He gradually looked on his lies as fully justified for self-defense.

On September 19, 1764, he wrote to D'Alembert with reference to the *Dictionnaire philosophique*: "As soon as the slightest danger comes up kindly notify me so that I may disown my writings in the public papers with my habitual frankness and innocence."

This weakness in his character naturally lessened the respect paid him by his contemporaries.

Nevertheless, he was and remained the Olympic Zeus in the minds of the most prominent men and women of his time. To literature indeed a Zeus, whose Olympic shock of hair, whose Ambrosian curls, were the wig affected by the fashion of that age. But with the wig removed he seemed like Houdon's marvelous statue, with the contours of his head more clearly visible, more wonderful than ever.

He had, like Heinrich Heine fifty years later, something of the tiger's lust to tear to pieces whomsoever challenged him, combined with the melodious richness of the mocking-bird and the charm of the gazelle.

In addition he had a winning way of suddenly dropping his anger at its highest pitch, as soon as the object of his wrath got in trouble and appealed to his heart. Just as he was moved and won over by the father of a man who had sold libels against him and therefore deserved punishment, he was willing to open his arms to Jean Jacques Rousseau, soon after he had published his *Lettres de la Montagne* against Voltaire, when a rumor (which, by the way, was false) induced him to flee to Ferney.

Voltaire's life work is an orchestra in which poetic spirit holds the soprano, a geniality founded upon the history of culture takes the alto, while hatred, meant in the first place for all cruelty and all prejudice, takes care of the instrumental music. The personal polemic is represented by the piccolo.

Bolingbroke said of Marlborough: "He was such a big man that I have forgotten his vices." Unfortunately, the historian cannot talk that way.

6

Voltaire takes root in France's classic seventeenth century. He believes in the literary and political greatness of this century, and in all substantial matters he pays homage to its taste. It is surprising how much remains in him of the almost frantic adoration of King and Nobility. The classic kingdom and its aristocracy were based on the idea that through them a state of perfection was reached, therefore any demand for change appeared arrogant rebellion against the divine purpose with which the world was established. This conception had its majestic high priest in the person of Bossuet.

The playwrights of that time were forbidden the use of living questions in their dramas. While after the death of Louis XIV all discussion was concerned with the important questions of the day, one did not

speak openly of religion and world history, of politics and finances, of war and diplomacy, as one spoke in the reign just ended of the latest tragedy and the latest novel.

Voltaire enlivens the style of the time, which was lofty but academic. To the lightly spoken word he gives relief and the stamp of permanence.

He knew just what of the admired seventeenth century would captivate posterity. Surely not what occupied the contemporaries most: Louis XIV's elegance, his appetite, his change in mistresses, his shifting to dreadful intolerance, his plundering generals, his ailment of a fistula. What Voltaire deemed the substantial thing of his time was the literature: Racine, Molière and Boileau, Corneille and La Fontaine, but above that a genius, not a Frenchman, who under the appletree in Woolsthorpe and later under the elms in Cambridge formed the modern civilization founded by Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler and Galileo: Isaac Newton.

When in the first half of the nineteenth century Voltaire had become the object of general contempt and his poetry was called obsolete and his critical ability limited, outside of France his belittlement of Shakespeare was cited again and again as it is expressed in his letter to the French Academy. It was not mentioned that this letter had been written when he was eighty-two years old and that it was the expression of senile stubbornness and zeal; it was never mentioned that it had been none other than Voltaire who in his youth had introduced Shakespeare to France and had translated and annotated his works. Regardless of its exaggerations this letter of Voltaire corresponds exactly to Goethe's essay *Shakespeare und kein Ende*, written at an advanced age. And nothing else made Voltaire so popular in France.

Shakespeare he could criticize. To Newton he bowed unconditionally. In France he was the first to be filled with enthusiasm for Newton and to make his work understood; likewise he was the first of all to appreciate what the accomplishment of awakening natural science meant.

Henceforth natural phenomena were to be ex-

plained not as miracles but as the working of natural laws. And facing the rising sun of science, specters and ghosts dissolved. It extinguished the pyres on which heretics, Jews and witches had been burned alive. It broke the chains of the insane and of the negro. It conquered the earth differently and with more thoroughness than any Roman Emperor or King of Huns. But if one asks where in Europe's best literature one first meets a correct conception of science, the answer from the lips of scientists, even from those of a Dubois-Reymond, will be: "First in Voltaire."

France at the time of Voltaire was a hundred years behind England in sciences. When Newton, in 1686, brought his *Principia* before the Royal Society, Voltaire's meritorious predecessor, Fontenelle, was revising in his famous discussion *La Pluralité des Mondes,* Descartes' theories which Newton had gone far beyond. Forty years later Fontenelle defended this doctrine in his speech to the memory of Newton. In France, that is, in Versailles and Paris, it was standard for the academicians and Jesuits who were in charge of instruction.

As remarkable as Descartes' results had been in mathematics and pure philosophy, to physics as regards the causes of gravity, the nature of light, and floods and tides he brought a guess only. The effects of magnetism he associated with the windings of screw-like molecules.

Voltaire wrote *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton*—not as an extract from Newton's *Principia,* but as an independent description of his discoveries in optics and astronomy. The chancellor d'Aguesseau refused him permission to print this work. It was published in the Netherlands. Voltaire captivated the court, the ladies and the abbés, who to that time had done homage to Fontenelle, explained the new conception of the law of gravity, of the refraction of the rays of light, and did away with a great many errors, thus preparing the way for d'Alembert and Lavoisier.

As a scientist he had an even surer eye for the nature of phenomena than had Réaumur and Euler, and in his forecasts and prophecies was far ahead of his

time. The limited extent of his research was to be expected on account of the crude knowledge of chemistry of the time and the impossibility of exact measurement of energy or mass. With absolute intellectual independence he raised himself above the scientific and metaphysical errors, the advocates of which at that time bore the most prominent names, as Descartes and Leibnitz. Plain common sense, developed to genial open-mindedness, enabled him to perceive and destroy phantoms, and to build on experience alone.

His limitations, in the realm of the sciences, are to be detected in points at which common sense, even at its acme, does not suffice. He could raise himself above Buffon, where the latter believed in a certain fantastic primeval procreation, and poured his mockery on that species of eel which it was said could be created from a mixture of flour and mutton-gravy. On the other hand, in his excessive inclination to believe in the obvious as the only fact, he got to the point where he regarded petrifactions as accidental formations. Their true nature had been known much earlier by the genial potter of the Renaissance, Bernard Palissy. In his doubt of the biblical story of the Flood, which was supposed to be proven by shells found on mountains, he misunderstood the true geological conception which previously had been so clear to Leonardo and later to Goethe. But, in sharp contrast to Goethe, he had a fine feeling for Newton's mathematical physics and argued in favor of the inductive method.

In the numerous instances where Voltaire rejected the correct theory his error was due to the fact that for the refutation of his objections a century of research was necessary; thus he rejected the doctrine of the conservation of energy because energy disappears after the collision of rigid bodies, and because energy is formed in the animal. So his contemporaries as well as he failed to find the source of the energy when a spark creates fire.

In Cirey, Voltaire had a physical apparatus and the chemical equipment then known, a laboratory and a dark-room. He was the first to carry out a not un-

important optical experiment suggested by Newton. His observation that the same amounts of different liquids at a different temperature do not adopt the average temperature brought him very near to the discovery of the specific warmth of the physical body.

Had he developed a little further his ideas of the calcination of metals and of the compound nature of air, he would have been the first to discover oxygen and the reduction of oxygen, which actually was discovered by Scheele, in 1774, forty years later. Not without reason have the great scientists of the nineteenth century paid the highest respect to Voltaire's chemical researches.

It was science that enabled him to note the difference between the war history of his time and the history of civilization. In hundreds of his critical studies and letters he expressed courageously and clearly the fundamental ideas of science. As historian and poet, thanks to his intellectual suppleness, he saw events alternately from the general, human standpoint (as in his *History of Charles XII*) and from the super-human standpoint from which the earth is seen as one heavenly body among the others (as in his *Essai sur les Mœurs* and in *Micromegas*).

A study of history founded like that of Voltaire on science, shows the wretchedness of the hitherto existing war history of man—this account of incessant fighting for a few strips of land—and the unworthiness of its ecclesiastical history—this fabric of man's feverish dreams about abodes and manifestations of superior beings, camouflaged with the name religion.

Since Erasmus' time there had been no one to hate and abhor war as much as Voltaire.

He has told us of the circumstances which led him to the philosophy of history. One day Madame de Châtelet told him that she (who was so expert in mathematics and physics) was actually disgusted with history. "What good is it to me, a Frenchwoman, living at her country-seat, to know that in Sweden Egil succeeded Hakon or that Ottoman in Turkey was a son of Ortogul? With pleasure I read the history of the Greeks and Romans, which offers me great and attractive pictures. But never have I been able

to finish reading the history of a modern nation: a mess of unimportant events without connection, a lot of battles that don't mean anything."

Voltaire answered that the study of history would not be a waste of time, if one would dismiss the particulars which are so boring and unbelievable, and retain the fundamentals which are hidden by these particulars. That in this way chaos would be transformed into an intelligible picture. Instead of a motley multitude of names, dates and fables we would produce history itself.

For him laws, art, literature and customs were the main goals of the historian; the inconsequent details were an unnecessary ballast which had to be removed. Thus he became the creator of the modern history of civilization.

Not as a historian, but as a poet Voltaire was esteemed most highly by his contemporaries. He was a born poet; from his boyhood he wrote excellent verse, and this gift stayed with him until he was an old man. No one has surpassed him either in prose or in poetry in that main virtue of writers which is called conciseness—moreover, there is in his best verse a certain melody akin to that with which a hundred years later Lamartine won all hearts.

By his contemporaries Voltaire was overestimated as a poet. To Frederick the Great as well as to Catherine II he appeared a greater epic poet than Homer, the equal of Vergil and Ariosto. Nowadays he hardly counts as epic poet. As a lyric poet his contemporaries put him on a plane with Horace with whom he can hardly be compared. What we today esteem most are his short epigrammatic verses. These and the short philosophical novels, his witty and phantastic rogueries in the form of stories, tales or letters, are the most perfect things he did. That portion of his work will continue to survive.

Immortality will probably be allotted to *Candide* also, with its keen satire of Pope's and Leibnitz's smug contentment with the system of the world, with its impudent description of the fate of the Confident and the Faithful.

As a tragedian and in general as a dramatist Vol-

taire represents the transition from Racine to Victor Hugo. After passing through the period of tragedies in his youth his plays become more and more eloquent melodramas like those of Hugo, but in the classical style. Great as was Voltaire's comic talent, abundantly rich in wit as he could be outside of the stage, he lacked real talent as a writer of comedy. He did not produce one comedy of any value. Whoever seeks pleasure in his incomparable wit must not look for it in his theatrical works.

Horace Walpole said: "The world is a comedy for him who thinks, a tragedy for him who feels."

Since Voltaire thought as well as felt, his satirical humor changed to terror at the sight of the crimes of tyrannical fanaticism.

As the inconsiderate and shameless mocker with the devilish wit which metamorphosed to the Angel of Light, the great Lucifer himself, he inspired respect even in men and women of little sensitiveness.

When in Petersburg Catherine of Russia stepped into the room where Voltaire's books, which she had bought after his death, were kept, she bowed deeply before his portrait and said to her secretary Wagnière: "This is the man to whom I owe all I know and all I am."

To the Prince de Ligne she said a few years later: "I wanted to profit from intercourse with your ingenious men ending with *-istes* (the encyclopedists); I have tried them; I had them come to me; sometimes I wrote to them; they bored me and didn't understand me. Just one was my good protector, Voltaire. Do you know that it was he who taught me in modern fashion? He afforded me the pleasure of reading his works, and taught me much, while at the same time he entertained me."

To her Voltaire was the trumpet of glory personified.

7

To be sure, he was not great like Michel Angelo, or deep like Spinoza, or filled with the human understanding of Molière.

But compare him with Luther! Even today Luther attracts by his vigor, his viewpoint of the people, his unchanging aim to discover the truth. But he was and remained a superstitious peasant. Voltaire was free from superstition. Luther was essentially intolerant and became more and more so. Voltaire is, in spite of his passion for reform, not second to Luther, the great advocate of tolerance. Luther, with all his appeal to the right of Nature as opposed to the Catholic asceticism which was contrary to Nature, had no notion of science. Voltaire was a scientist of the first order.

Luther made a deeper impression upon the popular mind, but the impression was limited and limiting. Luther freed. Voltaire still frees.

In the public consciousness Voltaire is still the great mocker. But in the second half of his life those around him looked upon him with different eyes. The Countess de Genlis, who as a devout Catholic had a deep aversion for Voltaire, but nevertheless, visited him in Ferney, wrote of him: "His portraits and busts resemble him very much. But no artist has reproduced his eyes. I expected to find them gleaming and fiery—and they really have the most spiritual expression I have ever known. But at the same time there is something velvet-like in them, an indescribable mildness."

The same lady, after having seen the grounds near Ferney, wrote: "He is here greater than in his books; for everywhere one notices a genial kindness. One cannot imagine that the same hand which has written so much that is godless, false and malicious should have created so much that is noble, sensible and useful. He showed us his estate, explained to us in a simple, natural manner everything he has built or started to work on, and by no means seemed to pride himself upon it. I don't know any one else who could do it."

Is it not strange that Voltaire ends as seventy years later Goethe's Faust dreamed to end, "a great lord blessing everywhere the inhabitants of a free and happy colony of which he is the founder"?

If one stands in the foyer of the Théâtre Français,

that room which for centuries has been one of the focal points of intellectual Europe, one sees excellent busts of all the more or less prominent dramatists of France, in rows along the walls, a whole army of the intellect, in marble. In the first large hall, opposite the mirror in front of which stand the busts of Corneille and Molière, there is a single dominating statue, Houdon's famous sitting Voltaire. It towers above the busts, with his indescribable smile and that clever hand grasping the back of the chair.

Such was not the lot of the man in life. Abhorred by Louis XV, he actually was banned from Paris much of his life and when, during his last visit to Paris, he died, permission to have him buried there was refused. He had always feared that his body would be thrown in the carrion-pit. In his youth, when the clergy refused a grave to his good friend, the great and noble actress Adrienne Lecouvreur, he wrote these famous lines:

> Ah, verrai-je toujours ma faible nation,
> Incertaine en ses vœux, flétrir ce qu'il admire,
> Nos mœurs avec nos lois toujours se contredire
> Et le Français volage endormi sous l'empire
> De la superstition!

When he died he, too, was denied a grave, and the slim, little corpse escaped the danger of being thrown into some hole in a waste field, thanks only to a nephew who had him brought in deepest secrecy to the Abbey Scellières in Champagne, in the cellar of which the simple coffin was hid. Later the prior of the abbey was dismissed because he had permitted the coffin to remain there.

In this abbey the coffin stayed for thirteen years, nameless. Then, in July of the year 1791, during the revolution, the sarcophagus, drawn by twelve white horses, made its solemn entry into Paris. He received an ovation that Paris has never before or since accorded the remains of King or Emperor. When, fifty years later Napoleon's coffin was brought home from St. Helena, the enthusiasm was trifling in comparison.

In the year 1814, however, some young reactionaries broke into the Panthéon at night, gathered

Voltaire's bones in a sack, took them through night and fog to a dump heap, and buried them in a place where they could never again be found.

Thus, on the dump heap ended the earthly remains of one who had been adored by his contemporaries as their genius, who during the revolution had passed for more than a demi-god and in whom posterity sees a mighty figure belonging not merely to literary history but to world history.

II

CHILDHOOD

1

Francois Marie Arouet was born on November 21, 1694, in the parish of Paris, Saint-André-des-Arts, the fifth and last child of an able and honest man, François Arouet. From 1685 to 1692, that is from his twenty-sixth to his forty-third year, his father held the position of notary in the Châtelet in the Department of Justice, and soon afterward was promoted to the distinguished and profitable position of Receiver of Court-Fees, Fines and Taxes, of the Chamber of Accounts.

François Arouet, who in the course of time became to his son a hard and stubborn father, was in reality a reasonable, strictly honest, educated Parisian, socially inclined, with a taste for good literature and refined social life.

His family—tanners, cloth-merchants and farmers—can be traced as far back as 1523, to a master-tanner named Helenus Arouet, in Poitou. In the course of centuries the Arouets raised themselves from the level of artisans to the upper middle-class, were given the then especially prized honor of having their burying-places assigned in the community churches, allied themselves by marriage with lawyers and tradesmen, became themselves owners of large drapers-shops and added their names to the landed gentry. They were considered notables in their districts, and became landowners of Pas-de-Cygne, and La-Motte-au-Fées. In Paris they were drapers.

Voltaire's father was in constant connection, as attorney, with the most prominent names of France; he was notary of the Duke de Bethune-Sully, of the Duke de Praslin and of the Duke de Saint-Simon, and

it is said that these great lords treated him less as a legal advisor than as a friend.

In the few passages of his memoirs in which Saint-Simon deigns to mention Voltaire, he does not forget to refer to the relation between Voltaire's father and his own: "He was the son of my father's notary, and I often saw him delivering papers for signature. He never could make anything of this freethinking son of his whose freethinking has in the end made his success under the cloak of the name Volterre."

Two contemporaries of Voltaire's father, the Dukes of Saint-Simon and of Richelieu, were godfathers to Voltaire's older brother Armand.

In June, 1683, François Arouet the father had married a cheerful, lovable young girl who, like himself, came from Poitou, but was of noble family. Marie Catherine Daumart de Mauléon was related to the first families of the province. Of charming appearance, she had, according to the assertion of her famous son, all the intellect which could be found in her family. Her father and brother were office-holders, her father what nowadays would be called record-keeper (*greffier criminel*) in the Parliament. Her brother, who was Controller-General of the Royal Guard, had early introduced her at court where she got an impression of the gilded superficial society that crowded the drawing rooms of the palace at Versailles. She brought the elder Voltaire no dowry, but probably it was to her that he was indebted for his influential acquaintances, not only those just mentioned, but such powerful families as the Caumartins, the Nicolais and the Chateuneufs. It was she, too, who made her house the rendezvous of the wits of the time.

The family Daumart had its escutcheon: a silver tower on an azure field. When, in 1696, an escutcheon was bestowed upon Marie Daumart's husband, mainly for the reason that the revenue office collected taxes on such distinctions, he was given permission to add three red flames in a gold field to the silver tower. In *l'Armorial* of 1696 he figures as *François Arouet, conseiller du roy, receveur les*

épices à la chambre des Comptes porte d'or à trois flammes de gueules.

Madame Arouet's was a youthful, natural, lively nature. A good friend of Ninon de Lenclos, she liked the frank, gay tone she found at Ninon's house. Her husband was Ninon's notary. She was not altogether free from aristocratic prejudices, and it was no doubt she who induced Arouet to apply for heraldic colors. He was so far from vain about it that he jokingly remarked the escutcheon was rightly due him, since he had paid for it. She loved the gay social life of a young married woman and was very popular; and, since she had friends among the talented, worldly men who visited her house, she did not seem to have escaped becoming, about the year 1700, the subject of gossip which was, however, more frivolous than malicious. Her husband never made complaint.

She brought five children into the world, but lost two at an early age.

The eldest son was altogether different from the younger. Rather heavy, taciturn, reserved and a little clumsy, he had that kind of talent which felt itself drawn to theology, and he studied, not unsuccessfully, in the seminary of the Oratoire. In contrast to his younger brother, he was a family man, attentive to all his relatives, dutiful towards his father who, indeed, was highly satisfied with this son and according to the custom of the time made a will bequeathing his office of fee and fine collector to the boy after his death. In their boyhood the two brothers got along fairly well, and, in spite of his slower temper, Armand, the elder by more than ten years, did not lack good ideas, when the friends of the family amused themselves by egging on the brothers to play practical jokes on each other. But before long an estrangement took place, presumably because of the more brilliant education of the younger and the distinguished acquaintance he had already begun in his boyhood to build up. The attachment quickly became an aversion. At home the younger played the rôle of the prodigal son who thought himself rejected and disdained, the elder became the good son and father's darling. But it never came to pass that the

father relented and killed the fatted calf for the prodigal.

Armand appeared to his younger brother, who in frivolous spite always called him the Jansenist, as the type of the dull, pious fanatic. Did he not become an enthusiastic adherent of a certain deacon Pâris, one of the most prominent exponents of Jansenism, a man whose pretended miracles had attracted general attention, caused considerable excitement and resulted in police prosecution? Armand himself was under arrest for a short time. At the time of his boyish pranks Voltaire had never turned to his brother to soothe his enraged father. He would prefer any one of his friends in the house. One mitigation of these strained relations took place, lasting only a short time. When both were elderly and Armand (in December, 1739) had an apoplectic stroke, Voltaire was so deeply moved that he offered to travel to Paris in case his brother wished to see him. But when the latter improved the atmosphere of reconciliation came to an end.

As a young boy François bore the nickname Zozo, and we still have a letter of the year 1704, written by Armand, but signed by both: Zozo, Arouet.

A sister born eight years before Voltaire, Marguerite-Catherine, who married François Mignot, an official of the chamber of accounts in Paris, died in September, 1726. She was a simple and dignified woman who exhausted herself in her maternal duties; neglected at first, but after her death grievously mourned by her wandering poet brother, who did all he could for the children she left behind. It was not at all easy for him to win over the oldest daughter; in 1738 she came to Cirey, where he married her to a Captain Denis, an honorable and able man, a Knight of Saint-Louis. Widowed in the year 1744, she became the housekeeper of her uncle. She was a sister-in-law of the abbé Mignot, a good-hearted and at the same time practical man, who collected sinecures, got his income from the abbey in Scellières and held the position of a senator in the Parliament of Paris, but who is remembered chiefly because,

after Voltaire's death, he removed the poet's body and thereby saved it from insult.

Among the guests of the Arouets there was a Monsieur de Lesseville whose ancestor owed his success to a unique incident and had been ennobled. One day he loaned King Henry IV, when the latter was in great embarrassment, the sum of 20,000 livres without accepting a promissory note. His descendants had enriched themselves, become members of Parliament, affected escutcheons and liveried servants, held big hunts and spent a great deal of money. Patiently Madame Arouet listened to the hunting-stories of M. de Lesseville, found it flattering to receive such a mighty senator and had hopes that the acquaintance would set her younger son upon the pathway to glory and honor. She arranged for François to be a school-mate of a nephew of M. de Lesseville, who was meant to become a town-councillor. She hoped that joint studies would result in a joint profession. But she died too soon to see her ambitions realized, and when her husband assumed them the exacting father and his free-souled son were immediately and impossibly antagonistic.

The beautiful and lively mother died in July, 1701, at the age of forty, when her famous son was not seven years old. He suffered an immense loss. One can see from his intellectual stamp, that he was in want of the influence and tenderness of a mother, although he never speaks of this privation.

2

The house in the diocese Saint André des Arts, in which Voltaire was born, is unknown. Gone, too, is the house which, shortly after the birth of the child, was assigned to his father as his official residence, a spacious apartment in a big building which was situated where the rue de Jérusalem and the rue de Nazareth crossed. The largest room had a beautiful ceiling of vaulted arches.

This house in which Arouet's youngest son spent his boyhood was situated opposite the house of

Nicolas Boileau Despréaux. In 1683, the notary had, together with a colleague, drawn up Boileau's will, and their connection did not end with that piece of business. The poet was a frequent guest of the family Arouet, and during his vacations Arouet with his wife and little son not infrequently visited the house in Auteuil, of whose garden and gardener Voltaire speaks in his poem *Epître à Boileau*. It does not seem, however, that the famous Despréaux succeeded in entertaining the young wife; she said of him: Good book, but stupid man (*Bon livre mais sot homme*). True, Boileau was thirty-five years her senior.

Arouet knew a still more famous French poet, the great Corneille himself, as a frequent drinking companion. But from what his son says, Pierre Corneille succeeded no better in entertaining the husband than had Boileau in entertaining the wife. Voltaire writes: "He told me the great man was the most boring mortal he had ever seen, and his conversation the dryest" (letter of September, 1761).

Among the gifted men who were intimate friends of the family and who took a friendly interest in the little boy, the Abbé de Chateauneuf must be mentioned. He and his brother, the Marquis, were Savoyards who had made their fortunes in Paris. The marquis had been French Ambassador to Constantinople and to The Hague and was an educated and sensible man. The Abbé, best known as Voltaire's godfather, received a yearly income from an ecclesiastical property and was a merry worldling and a fellow of the circle which gathered in Le Temple around the Archprior of Vendôme, that descendant of Henry IV and Gabrielles d'Estrés, who, according to the description of Saint-Simon, possessed all the vices of his brother, the duc de Vendôme. He was excessive in every natural and unnatural way, devoted to drinking, and "dishonest to the core which, by the way, was rotted with venereal disease." But in his youth he had been a rather nice fellow and remained all through his life extraordinarily clever and entertaining. About the prior's best friend, the Abbé de Chateauneuf, the same Saint-Simon has only good to say. He calls him "a man of good companionship, sought-after in the

best circles." A friend of the much loved Anacreonic poet Chaulieu and of Ninon de Lenclos, he might have made through the latter the acquaintance of the family Arouet. Just as warmly received in the house was the noble lyricist Rochebrune, whose bastard Voltaire calls himself jokingly in a poem to the Maréchal de Richelieu.

Another of the intimate circle of the aging Ninon, as well as one of the closest friends of the house Arouet, was the Abbé Nicolas Gédoyn. He is said to have shared with Chateauneuf the honor of being the last lover of Ninon. After having been a Jesuit for ten years he left the order and freely took part in social life, lived on the income from a canonship of the Saint-Chapelle, which the Court had granted him, and had, as Voltaire says, "no other home than ours." He was a fine and learned man, a good narrator, entertaining, but often too passionate in disputes. He had been one of the most eager to support Boileau in his battle for the acknowledgment of the superiority of the writers of antiquity over the moderns to whom Perrault dared give the palm. Gédoyn would have liked to canonize Vergil and Horace and cited their excellences with an uncontrolled fire which highly pleased Madame Arouet and which Rochebrune did his best to arouse in order to amuse the lady of the house.

As a child Voltaire certainly learned many things from Gédoyn; but Zozo's real teacher was the Abbé de Chateauneuf. The first qualities the boy displayed were an attentive liveliness, and a susceptibility to impressions which struck sparks of wit and rouguery from him. Chateauneuf, who, like the whole circle, was irreverent, amused himself by letting the four-year-old child learn by heart verses from Lourdet's impious *Moïsiade*. This mockery of the Bible was taught the child at a tender age, and his mother seems to have found this a good joke.

Entranced by the charm and liveliness of his little god-child, Chateauneuf brought him up in his own way, using the admiration the child naturally would feel for the older man.

He introduced Zozo at the house of Ninon de Len-

clos. Voltaire insists that, at that time, he was thirteen, but that is an impossibility, for by that time Ninon had been dead two years. He visited her at the age of ten or eleven, and it is certain that the verses written by the little boy aroused her interest. He wrote verse before prose. Verse was his natural language.

There can be no doubt that these verses which procured his admission to Ninon's house are "The Petition of an Old Soldier"—which in several editions of Voltaire is postdated. One day the old soldier came to the school which little François attended and asked one of the teachers, Father Porée, to write for him a petition to the King's son (le Grand Dauphin) in whose regiment he had served. As Father Porée for the moment was busy, he told the invalid to apply to little François Arouet who, after half an hour, handed him the following enchanting petition in verse:

Noble sang du plus grand des rois,
Son amour et son espérance,
Vous qui sans régner sur la France
Regnez sur les cœurs des François;

Pourrez-vous souffrir que ma veine,
Par un effort ambitieux,
Ose vous offrir une étrenne,
Vous qui n'en recevez que de la main des Dieux?

La nature en vous faisant naître,
Vous étrenna de ses plus doux attraits
Et fit voir dans vos premiers traits
Que le fils de Louis était digne de l'être.

Tous les à l'envie vous firent leurs présents;
Mars vous donna la force et le courage,
Minerve, des vos jeunes ans,
Ajouta la sagesse au feu bouillant de l'âge,

L'immortel Apollon vous donna la beauté,
Mais un Dieu plus puissant que j'implore en mes peines
Voulut me donner mes étrennes
En vous donnant la libéralité.

Nobody will deny that this as the product of a ten-year-old boy is extraordinary.

One could wish that Voltaire in his report of his

visit to Ninon had a friendly word for her and had not restricted himself to a description of her resemblance to a mummy. The anecdote which he tells of Chateauneuf and Ninon (which, on the other hand, is ascribed to Gédoyn, and not Chateauneuf, by the author of the *Vie de Mademoiselle de Lenclos*), seems to be invented to show how she was able to attract her suitors. Chateauneuf wooed her; she let him languish for some time and then set a certain day. When he asked why she had chosen that special day, she answered that she wanted to celebrate her seventieth birthday. In reality at seventy she had long abandoned all gallantry. Her house was a place where youths met to learn good taste. Such strict judges as Saint-Simon and Madame de Sévigné speak of her with the highest respect. To transfer the anecdote to Gédoyn is still more absurd, since he had not been introduced to her before 1694, when she was seventy-four years old. With him she would have had to celebrate her eightieth birthday.

It is true that Ninon was pleased with the bright boy brought by Chateauneuf, so much pleased that she willed him two thousand francs to buy books. There is something alluring and drolly surprising in this friendship of the eighty-four-year-old Ninon and the ten-year-old Voltaire. The abdicating queen of beauty and of free eroticism, the friend of Molière, did homage to the young heir to the throne of the mind. Many times Voltaire recalls with warmth the benefactor of his childhood.

In contrast to the mischievous tone in which he speaks of her in *Défense de mon Oncle* is, first of all, the pretty play *Le Dépositaire*, performed in the provinces in 1767, which was written solely for her glorification. It is taken from an anecdote told by the Abbé Chateauneuf in his *"Dialogue on Ancient Music."* Moliére is reported to have said that no one ever had so keen a sense of the ridiculous as Ninon de Lenclos, and that when he read to her his *Tartuffe* (probably the first three acts) she told him something that had happened to her with a gentleman whom she described so vividly that his own Tartuffe seemed to him pale by comparison. Her friend Gour-

bille had entrusted part of his property to the gallant and philosophical Ninon, and another part to a man supposed to be very pious. The latter kept the deposit for himself, while she who had not been supposed to be very conscientious returned her part intact. In the play Ninon is thirty-five to forty years old and is pictured as a lady of good breeding who sees through the character of the other trustee.

A finer and more impressive description of her is in the dialogue *Madame de Maintenon et Mademoiselle de Lenclos.* It contains an entire philosophy of life: Madame de Maintenon and Ninon, who had been friends at school, had lost touch after Madame de Maintenon had become so important a person at court. Madame de Maintenon, weary of a life spent in splendor and luxury at the side of a King who is no longer capable of amusement, visits Ninon and asks her to give up her free habits to come to court, and give her the companionship she missed. In Ninon's refusal there is a gentle, Horatian epicureanism in which she expresses her preference for a modest but free existence.

Finally, the letter dated 1771, *Sur Mlle. de Nenclas,* is an account of the still fresh traditions of Ninon, of anecdotes about her, of verses written against her by rejected adorers, or in her honor, by accepted. The famous Dutch astronomer Huyghens wrote that epigram which is rather frivolous for an astronomer:

Elle a cinq instruments, dont je suis amoureux.
Les deux premiers ses mains, les deux autres ses yeux . . .

We must not fail to mention another frequent visitor to the house on the corner of the rue Jérusalem: it was the Intendant of Finance, Louis Urbain Lefèvre de Caumartin, Marquis de Saint-Ange, descended from a family famous in the times of Louis XIII. In the circle of poets and musicians which met in Madame Arouet's house he felt at home and like the great gentleman he was, seems to have gained young Voltaire's confidence to an unusual extent. It was he who interposed between father and son at their quarrel after Voltaire's violent love affair in

Holland in 1714. He, too, was the first to encourage the young poet to write his *Henriade*. It was Caumartin who supplied him with most of the material used in *The Century of Louis XIV*. Saint-Simon calls him an especially mild-tempered man, socially inclined, who, despite his courtierlike tone and his haughty attitude, found pleasure in making himself obliging. He knew all the anecdotes of the old court and related them charmingly from a memory that retained everything read or seen. Voltaire, in 1716, paid him homage in his poem to the prince of Vêndome:

> Caumartin porte en son cerveau
> De son temps l'histoire vivante;
> Caumartin est toujours nouveau
> A mon oreille qu'il enchante;
> Car dans sa tête sont écrits
> Et tous les faits et tous les dits
> Des grands hommes, des beaux esprits;
> Mille charmantes bagatelles,
> Des chansons vieilles et nouvelles,
> Des ridicules de Paris.

His brother, the Abbé Caumartin, who later became Bishop of Blois and a member of the French Academy, was one of the stars in the notary's house. He was one of the noblest and most ingenious men in France. No one understood so well as he how to give an appropriate answer, to judge correctly, to phrase a compliment with a hidden sting, to lull into a feeling of security, to penetrate a secret or to observe an eloquent silence. His teasing wit was sometimes almost prophetic of Voltaire, only less sharp, less powerful, though no less subtle.

3

Although the imagination of the little boy was not —like that of Victor Hugo a century later—centered on his scenic and architectural surroundings, one of Voltaire's earliest deep impressions must have been of the Paris about him.

The Paris of that time was that of Louis XIV who died when Voltaire was twenty-one.

The architecture of Louis XIV is a triumph of classical dignity and loftiness, a world of regular and imposing mansions, gardens, bridges, churches and triumphal arches. It breaks with every national tradition, despises everything gothic. It satisfied taste by observing the rules which can be derived from the Antique, i.e., the Greek-Roman, still, as by Voltaire, considered to be one style, although it included eight centuries and two countries of profound inner differences. Hence the style of Louis XIV has its monotonous impressiveness, its obliteration of everything domestic and native, its uncompromising fight against local character.

Catherine II was so great an admirer of Louis XIV that she could not bear to hear the least belittlement of him. One day, the Prince de Ligne said to her: "Your Majesty at least might admit that this great King, whenever he wanted to take a walk on the bank of a canal, had to have an absolutely straight avenue, a hundred and twenty feet wide. He did not know, as you do, what a narrow bridge, a brook or a meadow meant."

To get an idea of the taste of the time take a collection of engravings of the old Paris, say by Perelle, and eliminate whatever partakes of the architecture and intellectual life of the Middle Ages, eliminate all points and spires like the wonderful Sainte Chapelle and the mighty Notre Dame, with its rich, temperamental world of fantastic figures. There is a transformation of Nature into Art in all things, every flower-bed is transformed into arabesques ingeniously flourished, every meandering brook is canalized to the regulated splendor of a fountain. The cave becomes a grotto, the castle a mansion with long horizontal lines and flat roof, the citadel a palace. While the fort-like construction on the main part of Chantilly, erected under Francis I, was really its chief claim to beauty, the aim in Fontainebleau is majesty combined with charm. This applies even more to Versailles, built in revolt against Nature in a desolate region.

The Paris of the Renaissance revealed itself in the *Place Royale* begun in 1604 by order of Henry IV.

There still stood the original bronze statue of Louis XIII—later replaced by another. The horse was the work of Daniele de Volterra, the figure of the King the work of Biar (1639).

The old Paris, with whose slang Voltaire shows himself most familiar, had its center on the "Island" where the symmetrical and harmonious structures of the Place Dauphine had raised their heads ever since the day of Richelieu, over a crowd of pedestrians, sedans and spirited horses drawing carriages. The carriages were heavy things, but beautiful, belling out at the top and looking like little houses with windows and roofs.

The great meeting places at that time were the Seine bridges as were a century later the galleries of the Palais Royal, and still another half century later the inner Boulevards.

The statue of Henry IV on the Pont Neuf was a center of the Paris of that day, and presumably it made a grave impression on the little Zozo. Henry IV soon became his hero. It was largely through Voltaire that this King subsequently became France's national hero, for at that time his memory was overshadowed by that of the Roi Soleil.

The Pont Neuf itself looked altogether different from any of the Seine bridges today. The Pont Neuf, Pont St. Michel, Pont au Change, Ponte Notre Dame, Pont Marie, Pont Saint Landry were not far apart, and several of them were built upon, like the Ponte Vecchio in Florence of today.

In the Place des Victoires stood, not the present equestrian statue, but Louis XIV on foot, crowned by the Goddess of Victory. Vanquished soldiers in chains surrounded the base.

On the boulevards could be seen Louis' heavy triumphal arches which are still there, with their cold trophies and allegories, the Porte Saint Denis and the Porte Saint Martin (1673 and 1674).

What the Court was to the people, Versailles was to the city of Paris. For a moment Madame Arouet won a foothold there, as later her son was to win a foothold and fight desperately to keep it.

Versailles was the pride of France as well as of

the King. It was the center of the empire; from an intellectual point of view, indeed, the center of Europe. It was a small world which represented the finest that could be extracted from the greater world without. How near and yet how out of reach it stood, the Palace of Versailles, object of admiration, home of mercy, with vestibules and courts, with vast cultivated parks with avenues and galleries instead of garden-walks, with Thetis' grotto in which Apollo the Sun God rests at Thetis' side. As Charles Perault suggested: "like the king who comes to Versailles to rest, after having done good to all mankind." There were lakes and cascades, there was the fountain of the pyramide filled with Tritons and Delphins, there was Latona's basin, neatly raked walks; nicely cultivated lawns, nicely raked beds, nicely pruned trees, nicely curry-combed horses, nicely powdered noblewomen, nicely peruked noblemen, the whole a sanctuary with its Holy of Holies, the place where the sovereign lived and breathed, blessing France and its vicinity. Here was the hall, where he took his meals, sitting alone at the table, dining—as told by Elizabeth Charlotte—on four plates of different soups, a whole pheasant, one partridge, a big dish of salad, mutton with garlic and gravy, a plate of pastry, then fruit and marmalade. Here, finally, was the Holiest of Holies, the bedroom where he slept, every inch a king.

It is very instructive to turn the pages of one of the traveler's guides to Paris of that time, and to see what was considered most worth while. Here is, for instance, one of 1727, the first year of Louis XV. It contains six to seven hundred pages in two thick volumes, is composed by a certain J. C. Nemeitz, Privy Councillor to the Prince of Waldeck, and is entitled: *Séjour à Paris, c'ést à dire instructions fidèles pour les Voyageurs de condition comment ils se doivent conduire, s'ils veulont faire un bon usage de leur temps et argent durant leur séjour à Paris.*

One arrived at Paris either by the common diligence or by the mail-coach. The postilion directed the traveler to an inn, and, if one gave him a tip, commended one to the favorable notice of the host. Those

who came to Paris to study the language did well to take up their residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, the resort of all foreigners, where most language teachers lived and where were the riding schools. There were theaters in this suburb and the opera was not far.

One should be warned against the fallacy that he could count on being served good food everywhere in Paris. If one could not afford to employ his own cook, it was best to take his meals at the regular tables of the landlords. Of intellectual nourishment the studies of French, mathematics and drawing were fashionable for foreigners. The chief ambition in studying the language was to be able to write a letter in correct French. Models regarding style were Voiture, Bussy-Rabutin and Fontenelle.

The wise traveler did well to keep a certain reserve in his intercourse with the countesses and marquises whom he met at the hotels; otherwise: rapid disappearance of the money that was to have paid the costs of his stay. There was no want of recreation. The gardens in the Tuileries were a nice promenade, also the park of the Luxembourg. However, the latter was supposed to be healthier, since where the Seine flowed past the Tuileries evil vapors arose. The Palais Luxembourg, then called also Palais d'Orléans, was freer of access and easier to inspect then than it is now.

The sensible stranger took only moderate part in balls, and masquerades, also was moderate in gambling. There was gambling everywhere, and the game offered an opportunity of meeting prominent ladies and gentlemen. There were also more innocent entertainments. The traveler should by no means miss the public festivals, the ecclesiastical processions. About Easter time there was a good Passion concert, and choral singing, especially in the cloister Val de Grâce (finished in 1669), the vaults and decoration of which were of interest.

Molière himself sang of it in a poem in which, typical of his age, he classed Pierre Mignard with the greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance. These

were mentioned in a most curious sequence:

> Et Jules, Annibal, Raphael, Michel-Ange,
> Les Mignards de leur siècle.

Les Ténèbres, as the Passion was called, was played beautifully by the royal orchestra.

On Maundy Thursday the King washed the feet of twenty-three boys and gave them food. Princes of the Blood waited on them and each boy was served thirteen courses. On the first of May the procession with the reliques of the Holy St. Denis took place. On the third day of Whitsuntide the young people of Suresnes (near Paris) amused themselves at a game which consisted in pulling off the neck of a goose.

On the eves of all important holidays the King, after receiving the Sacrament, touched with his hand several hundred sick who were brought to him by the charity physicians. He touched their cheeks, made the sign of the cross, and said: The King touches you, may God heal you!

Thus, there were plenty of public attractions. The park at Versailles was never closed. One could stroll about there as much as one pleased, save when the King promenaded.

4

When little François Arouet was nine years old, his father took him (in October, 1703) to the school of the Jesuits who at that time were in charge of the famous Collège Louis-le-Grand, directly behind the Sorbonne. In its time it was vigorously opposed by the University, but had only gained thereby. Famous Jesuits had lectured there to as many as three thousand students. When under Louis XIV the Jesuits gained complete control at Court and after the King, in 1674, had attended the performance of a tragedy produced in the classical manner by their pupils, he permitted them to put his name on their façade, and over-night the inscription *Collegium Societatis Jesu* became *Collegium Ludovici Magni.*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century this college was more fashionable than any other. The most prominent families of the aristocracy sent their sons there. After every vacation the street Saint Jacques was jammed with carriages in which arrived elegant young men with sword in belt, and when they descended, the street rang with the calls of their lackeys announcing their arrival: *Monsieur le comte de Guiche! Monseigneur le prince de Rohan! Monseigneur le duc de Montmorency!* Here Voltaire made a number of acquaintances who later were to prove of much use and great joy to him.

The Jesuits had early acquired a reputation as teachers and educators. They considered it highly important to instill self-confidence into their pupils. Their Christianity was, a half century before Grundvig, a happy Christianity. They tried to avoid the mistake the Jansenists had made, of suppressing eagerness and energy by their insistence on the fundamental corruptness of human nature damned by its sin; on the contrary, the Jesuits tried to cultivate energy, to prevent despair, to encourage ambition and the proper use of the intelligence. Moreover, they always knew how to capture the attention of their pupils, to instruct and at the same time to entertain and amuse them. They were never loath to arrange public contests and plays, to further the physical and mental development of the youths.

Naturally, the lessons given in 1703 in the College Louis-le-Grand were not of the modern type. The curriculum included mathematics, physics, chemistry, rhetoric, grammar and elemental philosophy. Latin was the foundation of the whole course. Whatever the pupils learned in general education was taught in Latin and was concerned with Latin authors. The object—as strange as it may seem—was to enable the pupils to write Latin verses and to deliver Latin orations. French was taught only as the knowledge of it fell like crumbs from the richly covered table of the Latin language. A knowledge of French was necessary in order to translate. Greek, it is true, was on the schedule, but was rather neglected. Hence, Voltaire

never became a good Hellenist, but was an excellent Latinist.

So deeply rooted was the domination of Latin that for centuries the tragedies and comedies in which the Jesuits let their French pupils act for their entertainment and the strengthening of the memory were written in Latin. It was even regarded as a dangerous radical gesture, when Father Porée, at the time Voltaire went to school, permitted purely French plays to be given in French. It became customary for the Latin tragedy to have its stage in the court-yard of the school, where an immense tent protected the spectators seated in a horseshoe in three rows and in the windows leading to the court. On the day the prizes were distributed a ballet and a tragedy were given, the expenses were met by the King. The "Little Comedy" (ludi priores) was written in French and was played in a second court; a screen was put up to isolate the theater, the stage of which faced opposite the library. Later a play by Père de Cerceau was so successful that its reputation went as far as the Court and the students had to go to the Tuileries and give it in the Galérie des Ambassadeurs.

Besides the plays there were mock-trials. The pupils conducted "law-suits," that is, made speeches in defense of medicine, rhetoric, poetry, philosophy, architecture, etc.—a rather childish idea of the good fathers! But even these sham trials were preferable to the horrible debates held at that time in the University of Copenhagen, and they fulfilled their purpose of training future orators for the bar or for public life.

The students boarded and lodged in the school. Of the more noble each had his spacious room. It seems that in the daytime the little Arouet shared a room with four others and had the same teachers as they, while at night he had his own cell.

The bright youngster, like other vivid children, was not only very inquisitive but unusually precocious. besides being mischievous and unruly; a true Til Eulenspiegel. He also knew how to interpret the meaning of a half-sung song. His mind was active, vivid, satirical, full of unexpected ideas, never tired

and always daring, as promptly ready for attack as for pert retort, fond of teasing, irritating, pointing out mercilessly the weaknesses of teachers and fellow students. At the same time he was warm-hearted as a friend and pupil, and at an early age made himself agreeable by a polite and courteous behavior, which all his life was a characteristic of nearly every letter and every verse of this man who before all things understood the art of pleasing.

5

There was only one teacher whom little François disliked, Father Lejay. Lejay spoke slowly and with difficulty; taught rhetoric, but was himself as uneloquent as can be conceived. Fond of mocking and teasing as the boy was, he mimicked this teacher and earned his enmity.

There are many anecdotes illustrating Voltaire's early developed tendency to criticize dogma and theology. Nevertheless, Father Lejay's reported outburst seems hardly probable: "Wretch! Some day you'll become the standard of deism in France!"

But for the rest, it is astonishing what warmth of feeling he showed for his teachers as well as for his comrades.

As regards the teachers, there are numerous references to permanent attachments on the part of the pupil, attachments that passed occasionally through rough weather, but which were sincere and deep. Of course there was no lack of people who saw in them only calculated hypocrisy, since there are numerous writings of Voltaire in which the Jesuits are shown in an especially disadvantageous light.

However, one is not justified in drawing from this any unfavorable conclusion as to Voltaire's honesty. The fundamental Jesuit idea of complete sacrifice of the individual for a system which eliminates and, as far as it can, destroys freedom of thought and of personality, was bound to provoke Voltaire's hatred. Nevertheless, he preferred the humane moral code of Jesuitism to the rigor of Pascal and the Jansenists.

Certain as it is that there are intolerable and fanatic personalities among the Jesuits no less than among other men in the Roman Church and outside of it, the noisy and pugnacious are rarely met with among them. No one who has been in touch with Jesuits from the different sections of Europe, be they English, French, Polish or Italian, could help being attracted by their unselfishness, their good breeding, their fineness and sincerity of character. They were at their best as teachers. They were not pedants. They knew how to arouse children's interest, and they had a rich enough knowledge of a variety of subjects to satisfy the curiosity they excited.

If one compares Jesuits as educators with Lutheran theologians, the scales swing violenty in favor of the Jesuits.

There can be no doubt that Voltaire felt the appeal which the Jesuit conscientiousness, gentleness and charm exert upon the impartial, and he has expressed his gratitude for the education they gave him, in strong words. At the age of fifty he writes in a letter dated February 7, 1746, to Father de Latour: "I was educated for seven years by men who took unrewarded and indefatigable pains to form the minds and morals of youth. Is it credible that anyone should fail to have some feeling of gratitude toward such teachers? How? It should be natural for a man to feel pleasure at the sight of the house in which he was born or of the village where he received the paid-for care of a foster-mother; so is it surprising that we should have a heart-felt love for those who gave us unselfish guidance during our first years? If the Jesuits on the Malabar islands have an action pending against Capuchins, what do I care? Is that any reason to be ungrateful toward the men who gave me an appreciation of good literature, who awakened feelings that to the grave will be the consolation of my life? Nothing can erase from my heart the memory of Father Porée who is equally dear to all who have studied under him. Never has anybody made a study more lovable by what he brought to it himself. His lectures were for us such an unmixed delight that I wish it had been the custom in Paris, as in

Athens to attend such lectures at any age; in that case I would have returned often to profit by them. I was so fortunate as to come under the tutelage of more than one Jesuit of Father Porée's character, and I know that his successor was worthy of him. If, finally, I were to be asked what I saw during the seven years I lived in the house of the Jesuits, I should say this: the most diligent, simple and regular life; every hour devoted either to the care of their pupils or to the exercises demanded by their strict confession of faith. I call to witness the thousands educated by them, as I was; there is not one who would belie my words."

All through Voltaire's life one can observe his continued attachment and gratitude to the teachers of his early youth. In 1738 he writes to Father Tournemine: "My very dear and most reverend Father, is it true that my *Mérope* has pleased you? Have you found in it any of the exalted feelings that you have planted in me in my youth? *Si placet, tuum est* (if you like the play it is yours). I always say that when I talk of you and Father Porée."

Apropos of his tragedy *Mérope,* he writes in the following year from Cirey to his friend Thiriot who deserved his friendship so little:

"Hurry in God's name to Father Brumoy; try to see some of these Fathers, my former teachers; they must never become my enemies. Talk with tenderness, with force! Father Brumoy has read *Mérope,* he is satisfied with it; Father Tournemine is enthusiastic about it. God grant that I have deserved their praise! Assure them of my unswerving devotion; I owe it to them; they educated me. He is a monster who does not love those who have fertilized his mind."

In 1729, he sends his *Henriade* to Father Porée with a letter which begins:

"If you, my reverend Father, recall a man who all his life will remember you with the tenderest gratitude and fullest respect, accept this work with some indulgence, and regard me as a son who after an absence of several years presents to his father the fruit of work in an art first learned from him. From

the preface you will see what fate this work has had, and I want to learn what fate, in your judgment, it deserves."

Among other things Voltaire asks whether he has spoken of religion "as he should." He writes with the same warmth in the letter of 1738 to Father Tournemine, on the same question—in his fear of hurting and grieving his old benefactors:

"If in several other works, which I carelessly let slip in my youthful hot-headedness and which were never meant for publication, works which have been cut and falsified and which I have never endorsed, if in such works there are remarks of which one can complain, my answer is short: I am ready to discard mercilessly whatever might cause anger, no matter how innocently it may be meant. It does not cost me anything to improve myself and my works."

Even though one must not take Voltaire literally, there can be no doubt that the feeling for his educators was sacred to him.

It was Father Tarteron who first gave the child Horace and Juvenal to read at a tender age, in carefully expurgated editions to be sure. Père de Tournemine was one of the most learned teachers of the institution, as much at home in mathematics as in philosophy, equally skilled in Greek as in Hebrew. He was Voltaire's first guide in literature and we have seen how flattered and happy he felt later at the admiration of his old teacher for his *Mérope*. Tournemine combined a vivid imagination with the purity of mind of a child. He admired the brilliant promise of his pupil, wishing only that he could "break him to the bridle." How attached young Voltaire was to him is shown when during the naïve love episode of his adolescence he wrote to his beloved Olympe, in Holland: "The first thing I want to do when I get back to Paris is to win over to you Father Tournemine."

Father Paullou was the boy's confessor and enjoyed, as letters of his school days show, the heartiest love of his pupil. Among the more or less reliable estimates of the young François, the following made

by Father Paullou is accepted universally: "This child is consumed with thirst for fame."

The youngest of the teachers and at the same time the one for whom Voltaire preserved such a fondness that all his life he never said a slighting word about him, was the cultured Father Thoulié who changed his name by means of an anagram and became famous as Abbé Olivet. He translated Demosthenes and Cicero, became an influential member of the French Academy and wrote its history. Voltaire felt a tenderness for him, which was mutual. For Voltaire he is Quintilian reborn, and Olivet for his part never hesitated to take the side of his former pupil in his numerous and often very bitter quarrels as, for instance, with J. B. Rousseau and with Desfontaine. There were coarse elements, there was even a certain rudeness in Olivet's nature; nevertheless, Voltaire in his letters addresses him thus: *Elegans et sapiens Olivete, vir doctissime! Vale dilige tuum amicum, tuum discipulum!*

To the most famous pupil of that institution, the dearest of all his teachers was, and remained, Father Porée. Porée was the born educator, such an accurate physiognomist that the character and abilities of each of his pupils were evident to him, and he could accordingly prescribe lessons to suit the special needs of each. His temper was even, his manner pleasant. He possessed an unbounded, contagious serenity, was indulgent and likeable. The peace in his soul was mirrored in his face. He loved good literature passionately and imparted this passion to his favorite pupil.

François did not live like the young nobles in the school, but led a quiet, reflective life. He worked assiduously, not with the diligence of the dull grind tied to the book, but more in his spare time than in class. He took no part in the games and dawdlings of his comrades, but eagerly drew his teachers out and held endless discussions with them. He investigated everything, sought enlightenment on philosophy, religion, literature, history, statecraft, natural science. Even subjects that ordinarily lie beyond the horizon of a schoolboy were not beyond his: current

events, politics, the government of France and other countries. As Father Porée wrote of him: "He liked to weigh Europe's interests on his little scale."

Even as a boy he appreciated good food and good wine, nice clothing and a certain personal elegance. He was never an ascetic. Since he was unusually frail, he dreaded cold weather.

It was a custom in school to spend the free hours in the courtyard as long as the water in the font of the chapel was not frozen. As the door to the chapel was open during the day, Voltaire used, as often as he had a chance, to put ice in this sacred vessel, so he would not have to leave his corner by the stove.

Every grade had its honor bench which was reserved for the best pupils. On the bench the most highly prized seat was not the first, but in winter that which was next the stove of Dutch tiles. For this grim battles were fought. One day, the freezing Voltaire tried to push a comrade from this seat, exclaiming: "Away with you, or you'll get a push that will enable you to warm yourself next to Pluto!" "Why don't you say: in Hell?" "Bah, one is no more believable than the other!"

There is another anecdote on the subject of Heaven. It was first told by his biographer Paillet de Warey (1824). A boy seated next to him insisted that Voltaire had hid his glass. Another called: "Arouet, return it, you are a trouble-maker who'll never go to Heaven!"—"What does he say about his Heaven?" responded the boy. "Heaven is the world's great dormitory."

6

Young Arouet passed through school without ever having been exposed to humiliating punishment. His comrades were not always so fortunate. The Marquis d'Argenson tells in his memoirs that he and the young Duke de Boufflers, Colonel of the regiment which bore his name and Hereditary Governor of Flanders, were whipped in presence of the whole class in punishment for a trifling prank. They

had blown peas at Père Lejay from a tube. The Maréchal du Boufflers complained of this to the King and took his son out of the school. The Marquis d'Argenson describes how embarrassing it was for him and his brother, both of whom were later ministers, to wear the coarse, black uniform of the Jesuit pupil. Before their entrance to college they had led the lives customary among young gentlemen, attended plays and social affairs, visited restaurants and women. Once, during a school comedy, his intimate friend, the young Prince de Soubise, entered the amphitheater wearing his resplendent cloak. The young Marquis, in his student uniform, was too mortified to look in his friend's direction.

At a distribution of prizes, in 1710, young Arouet and Jean Baptiste Rousseau saw each other for the first time. Rousseau heard Arouet called twice, and asked who the young man was. Père Tarteron replied that he was a boy who had an astounding talent for poetry, and proposed to introduce him, which he did. Rousseau found the face unpleasant—this, however, was not put on record before a bitter enmity had arisen between the older and younger poet—but the expression was vivid and bright and his behavior that of a very polite young man.

Notable among the friendships of his school days, one which lasted all his life, and became of the utmost importance to Voltaire, was that with the little Duke de Fronsac—he who was later so famous as Duke and Marshal de Richelieu but was best known as a conqueror of the other sex. Even the Duke de Lauzun hardly (although he, too, became famous in this regard) enjoyed such a reputation. Richelieu, like Lauzun, kept his attraction for women until his death. He lived to the age of ninety-two years (Lauzun died at ninety-one) and in the last year of his life he proved to the Court his skill in breaking young horses.

To the ladies Richelieu was an idol. Merely to be mentioned with him was held an honor. All showed themselves compliant, the coquettish and the prudes, princesses and women of the middle-class. They fought for his favor, sometimes even with fire-arms.

Madame de Polignac and the Marquise de Nesle, exchanged pistol-shots for his sake. The admirers who delivered his notes to other women kissed his hand for this favor; those whom he dismissed came back. Each morning he was given a packet of love-letters. Often he did not have the time to read them all, did not even open them and wrote with pencil on the envelope: "Letters I had not the time to read." At his death there were found on his table five billets-doux from prominent ladies who on one and the same day were asking for "one hour of his night." At that time he was ninety-two years old.

In school, Voltaire's acquaintance with the Duke —who left the institution early—was not intimate; but they often met in their youth at the houses of the Cardinal of Auvergne, the Duke de Sully, the Marshal de Villard and of Lord Bolingbroke. Even though the friendship was not helpful to Voltaire during the time of the Regency, when Richelieu was identified with the plot of the Church against the Regent and the conspiracy of 1718 to give up Bayonne to Philip V of Spain, later it was of great advantage. Apparently these two prominent, bewitching and arrogant personalities had a strong attraction for each other. They were equally elegant and equally impertinent. Not even the fact that Richelieu once had a trifling affair with the Marquise de Châtelet before Voltaire met her could harm this friendship. One should not believe Voltaire's detractors, such as Faguet, who try to make it appear that Voltaire's part in this relationship was that of a sycophant. On the contrary, when there were differences between them, he stood up against Richelieu as power against power. In the year 1722, that is, a little over a decade after the Duke left school, Voltaire writes to his friend, Thiriot:

"I am astounded at Richelieu's peevishness. I esteem him too highly to believe he could have spoken to you about me unpleasantly, as if I had denied to him what I owe him. I owe him friendship only, not submission, and if he has demanded that, I don't owe him anything. . . . I advise you not to see him again if you expect to hear him reproach me; it

befits him as ill to give a reprimand as it would befit me to deserve one."

The numerous poems and still more numerous letters to the Duke, which cover a space of more than fifty years, prove the firmness of the friendship. A letter of the Marquise de Châtelet to the Duke, at a time when she devoted herself entirely to Voltaire and when the Duke had married a second time, contains a passage which does credit to him and to her. She writes:

"I believe that I really am of some value since I can count upon your true friendship. . . . You know my heart; you know how completely it is filled. I am happy to love in you the friend of my lover. . . . This feeling would glorify the joy your friendship gives me, if I myself had not poisoned it. I can not forgive myself for having nourished passing ill-feeling, no matter how slight. Now the character of my friendship must strive to make up for this fault, and in case it should be this fault to which I owe your friendship, I want to say in spite of all my remorse: 'Happy crime!' (O felix culpa!)"

7

To return to Voltaire's other school friends. Special attention must be paid the brothers d'Argenson. Their father was Lieutenant-General of Paris under Louis XIV and thereafter Keeper of the Seal (Minister of Justice). Both sons rose to high positions. The older, the Marquis d'Argenson, the same age as Voltaire, remained his friend to the last day of his life. He became Foreign Minister of France. The younger, Count d'Argenson, with whom Voltaire was less friendly but who employed Voltaire in a diplomatic mission to the King of Prussia (1743-1747), became Minister of War under Louis XV. Because d'Argenson relied at Court upon Jesuit influence, Voltaire's attitude to him was cooler, even though in his letters to the older brother he likes to recall memories of school with their walks all three together in the "black allée."

With none of his friends did Voltaire keep up such a close friendship as with his real intimates among his school comrades. First of all there is Fyot de la Marche. The letters to him were published by Henri Beaune. His relations with Voltaire show respect as well as hearty attachment between the two men. But since Fyot de la Marche was a pious Catholic, the intimacy which denotes full mutual understanding is lacking. In contrast to this Voltaire was altogether hearty and confident with Cideville, senator in the Parliament at Rouen. The last letter to Cideville is dated August 30, 1765. He lived fifteen years longer, but became a bigot.

Among his lifelong friends are to be mentioned the two brothers Fériol, the Count d'Argental, and the Count de Pont-de-Veyle. Of these a little the less intimate was the stout Pont-de-Veyle, the epicurean, for whom it was hard to leave Paris to make a visit to Ferney. Doubtless Voltaire was more attached to d'Argental, who in letters is addressed: "My angel, my beloved angel, adored angel, divine angel"; but if he were writing to both brothers it is always just: "My angels!" There are extant letters to Pont-de-Veyle from the years 1736-1743, to d'Argental from 1734-1778. D'Argental is not only Voltaire's constant confidant but also, where it is necessary, his champion, e.g., in regard to Baculard d'Arnaud's ingratitude and slander. In the first sketch of Voltaire's *Septième Discours de la Vraie Vertue* are to be found the following lines:

> Tendre et fidèle ami, bienfaiteur généraux
> Qui peut te refuser le nom de vertueux?
> Jouis de ce grand titre, ô toi dont la sagesse
> N'est point le triste fruit d'une austère rudesse,
> Toi qui, malgré l'éclat dont tu blesses les yeux,
> Peux compter plus d'amis que tu as d'envieux.

One of the most heartily loved friends of those early years was Jean René de Longueuil, Marquis des Maisons, who died at thirty-two. His grandfather had been chancellor of Anne of Austria. He was five years younger than Voltaire and, like him, very precocious; at the age of twelve he found pleasure in reading the

Roman poets. At fourteen he became passionately absorbed in the study of physics, but did not neglect his law studies, which he was compelled to take up by the terms of his father's will. Jean was still a child when his father died. Louis XIV promised him his father's position as President of the Parliament of Paris, "hoping he would serve the King with the same fidelity as his father." When Maisons was eighteen the Regent gave him the right to take the chair of Parliament and to conduct the sessions. He fulfilled this duty to everybody's satisfaction. He was a friend of literature and of scientific research. He was an excellent chemist, and discovered a Prussian Blue which excelled all others. His garden contained the rarest plants. Here the coffee bean was for the first time successfully grown in France.

As Maisons' mother was the older sister of the Marquise de Villars, Voltaire doubtless through her met the great Marshal, and his wife, for whom as a young fellow he felt desperate and unreturned passion. It was during a visit of Voltaire's to the Castle of Maisons, in 1732, that he was taken ill with small-pox which then raged in Paris. His host and hostess showed him a touching solicitude; the great actress, Adrienne Lecouvreur, came to visit him and sat on his bed in defiance of the danger of infection. The exiled English statesman Bolingbroke visited him. In the opinion of the patient the physician Gervasi saved his life (see Voltaire's Epître xxv, A M de Gervasi). Voltaire had hardly left the Castle (December 1, 1723) when a fire started in the room in which he had been lying. Today the traces of this fire are still shown. In the poem in which Voltaire expresses his joy at being returned to life, he says:

> Je reverai Maisons, dont les soins bienfesants
> Viennent d'adoucir ma souffrance
> Maisons, en qui l'esprit tient lieu d'expérience
> Et donc j'admire la prudence
> Dans l'âge des égarements.

Maisons was like an older brother, an honest, severe, sometimes sharp critic of his work, and when he died, Voltaire expressed his grief in a letter to Cide-

ville (September 27, 1731). The letter begins: "My dear friend, the death of M. de Maisons has thrown me into a despair which borders on stupefaction. I have lost my friend, my support, my father. He died in my arms, not because of the ignorance of the physicians, but because of their neglect. I shall never be able to console myself for this loss, or for the cruel way it struck me." The same year he gave his friend a permanent monument in his poem *Le Temple du Gôut,* in which he sees his shadow after death. The passage begins:

O transports? ô plaisirs? ô moments pleins de charmes!
Cher Maisons! m'écriai-je en l'arrosant de larmes,
C'est toi que j'ai perdu, c'est toi que le trépas,
A la fleur de tes ans, vint frapper dans mes bras.
La mort, l'affreuse mort, fut sourde à ma prière,
Ah! puisque le destin nous voulait séparer,
C'était à toi de vivre, à moi d'expirer.

Although there has been mention of so many aristocratic acquaintances and friendships founded in youth and kept up in later years, Voltaire's attitude toward friends from the plain middle-class was no less hearty. It is sufficient to mention Thiriot. It increases our respect for the poet that, when in his later life, even after thirty years, he saw again his school comrades, who had suffered reverses, the old feeling found vivid expression. So it was with Le Coq, an unknown Bohémian, who one day presented himself emaciated to a skeleton, with sunken cheeks, unkempt beard and dirty linen. Voltaire, deeply touched, recognized him under his rags and gave him help (letter to Cideville of October 28, 1741).

III

EARLY YOUTH

1

Young Arouet was in his seventeenth year in 1711 and his best and most intimate friends had left school. He could hardly bring himself to look into the rooms they had inhabited. The birds had flown, the nests were deserted. He longed for them and longed to fly away as they had. He was weary of the monastic life of the college, of the Latin and Greek. That desperate melancholy came over him, common to all those who have outgrown school and to whom it means no longer a life of development, but of confinement.

But his father demanded that he pass his final examination; he passed it in May, 1711. Now all he had to cope with was the examination which would give him the degree of a Master of Arts. Though not required, that was helpful as an introduction to law studies. He sat at his books all through the summer and tortured himself with the study of the Sceptics, and Aristotle, and ethics, without passing the examination, until he got such a headache that his father relented and let his son free.

During the vacations, his friend Fyot introduced him to his relative, the Marquis de Mimeure, and this laid the foundation of the friendship between the poet and the clever Marquis de Mimeure, who became his protector. M. de Mimeure was a pleasant Mæcenas to the literati, and the hospitality Arouet enjoyed in his house increased his passion for a life of intellectual fresh-air.

The working-year began. The moment had come to choose a profession. At the announcement of the young man that he did not wish to become anything

other than a writer his father answered that this meant simply that he would be useless to society, a burden to his family, exposed to starvation.

Highly reluctant, young François started to hear lectures. They were held in a big barn of a building, for the law-students of that time were not spoiled. The tedious method of instruction, the useless stuff with which they wanted to burden his brain, enraged him so much that he felt himself drawn more than ever to literature. He thought more about Racine and Chaulière than about the *pandects*, rather of Madame de Mimeure than of the barbaric university Latin. He was not solemnly inclined, and patience he lacked altogether. He never completed his law studies. His father offered to buy him a position as Royal Attorney in Paris, but he declined.

Relations between father and son became more and more strained. "Tell my father," he said to a friendly would-be mediator, "that I don't care for honored positions which are purchasable; I shall earn respect without having it bought for me." On June 22, 1739, he wrote to the Marquis d'Argenson: "Since I entered this world without any particular standing, I was immodest enough to think I could as well as the next one make a place for myself if it was possible by will and work. I threw myself into the fine arts, which always carry with them a certain humiliation because one cannot by means of them become royal senator. Money can make one State Recorder of Petitions, but money cannot write a poem, and I wrote one." He was determined not to become a member of any profession and much as he craved power, knowledge, fame and the luxury of pleasure, he prized independence more highly.

2

The Court of Louis XIV, once the most brilliant in Europe, had in the King's latter years become the dullest and most somber. Yet, the person of the monarch was surrounded by splendor, in spite of the defeats of his armies and navies, in spite of the raised

taxes, the shrunken treasury, the increased loans, the general misery of the people. But under the dominance of Madame de Maintenon the King had become so pious and morally strict that the Court held no more feasts or plays and only an occasional stiff reception. The last time a ballet was danced before the King was in the year 1681, and the last opera in Versailles was staged in 1694. About the year 1711 the King hardly ever showed himself, for Madame de Maintenon no longer left her rooms, where she spent her time with two or three ladies-in-waiting who were as pious as herself. A few times a day the King visited her and worked with his ministers in her apartment. It scarcely seemed possible that this could be the same Court that forty years ago had been the home of youth and gallantry. A lowering cloud of depression rose in Versailles and spread its heavy pall over France.

There was bound to be a reaction against the scrupulous morality, the solemnity, the deadly boredom of the Court in the last years of Louis XIV; it came in the regency of Philippe of Orléans, in the form of a spirit of refined licentiousness, a sensuous, effeminate elegance.

One place of refuge for the relaxation of intelligent men and Anacreontic worldlings of Paris was *Le Temple,* the residence of the Grand Prior of Vendôme, who was expelled from Paris from 1706 to 1714 because of his excesses. He was a younger brother of the Duc de Vendôme, the famous general of whose frightful cynicism Saint-Simon gives a vivid sketch.

The Grand Prior's friends and companions assembled at his house in the Hôtel de Boisboudrand around the blythe, lyric poet Abbé de Chaulieu, the leading guest. Chaulieu lived in *Le Temple.*

Here the young man, fresh from school and university, was introduced by his godfather, the Abbé de Châteuneuf, at the age of twelve. Here he met not only Chaulieu, but also Abbé Servien, the uncle of the young dukes of Sully, about whom there was nothing priestly except his garb. Here, likewise he met Caumartin, the Abbé de Bussy, son of famous

Roger de Bussy Rabutin and in Voltaire's judgment wittier and more natural than his father; the Marquis de La Fare, known for a few good verses; the Duke of Aremberg; the President Henault, Madame du Deffand's friend many years later; Maximilien Henri de Béthune-Sully, who at first was the closest possible intimate of Voltaire, until his indifference to his friend's desperate illness broke relations between them.

The supper-parties of this group were intellectual orgies over which Bacchus reigned, while the Graces were not exactly too formal. Here the young man with the burning, sarcastic glance felt flattered to have a place among thoroughly experienced gentlemen and not inexperienced ladies. Here he sat, the newly discharged schoolboy, among princes and men from France's proudest aristocracy, and bewitched them by his nimble brain, his dextrous mockery, his imperturbable poise, his roguery, the charm of which none of them could approach. From the first day he treated them as equals. Just as almost a hundred years later Napoleon and his brothers sat on the thrones of Europe as though they had been born for that purpose and as if no one had ever doubted their right, so this half-grown Voltaire, blandly ignoring the strong spirit of caste existent in that day, treated men of the first families of France as if unquestionably he were quite as important as they.

Now and then there were envy and rivalry to be overcome, as with Chaulieu himself. Voltaire's first appearance as satiric poet had made Chaulieu ecstatic and he rewarded the young man for the poem *Le Bourbier* with a little composition which begins thus:

> Que j'aime ta noble audace,
> Arouet, qui d'un plein saut
> Escalades le Parnasse,
> Et tout à coup, près d'Horace,
> Sur le sommet le plus haut
> Brigues la première place.

But later when Voltaire won applause as dramatic poet, he wrote a well-known epigram against the young man. Nevertheless, one can see, from Voltaire's

works, the cleverness and artfulness with which he won them all over.

One reads, for instance, the long letter, written in mixed poetry and prose, to the Abbé de Chaulieu, dated July 15, 1716, which begins with the little verse:

A vous, l'Anacréon du Temple;
A vous, le sage si vanté
Qui nous prêchez la volupté
Par vos vers et par votre exemple,
Vous dont le luth délicieux,
Quand la goutte au lit vous condamne,
Rend des sons aussi gracieux
Que quand vous chantez la tocane,
Assis à la table des dieux.

This letter, which fills three large printed pages, consists of verses, smooth, fluent verses scribbled just before departure of the mail and is of an incomparable grace, the more remarkable since it was meant only for the eyes of a seventy-seven-year-old man.

One finds again, in Voltaire's *Le Temple du Gôut* (written fifteen years later) the same roguishness, the same nice skill and the same assurance in his descriptions of the frivolous masters of his youth.

Thus, first, of Chaulieu:

Je vis arriver en ce lieu
Le brillant abbé de Chaulieu
Qui chantait en sortant du table,
Il osait caresser le dieu
D'un air familier, mais aimable.
Sa vive imagination
Prodiguait, dans sa douce ivresse,
Des beautés sans correction.

Of Bussi, after a few disparaging remarks about his father, he says:

Mais sons fils, son aimable fils
Dans le temple est toujours admis,
Lui qui, sans flatter, sans médire,
Toujours d'un aimable entretien,
Sans le croire, parle aussi bien
Que son pere croyait écrire.

With droll impudence he writes of La Fare:

La Fare, avec plus de mollesse,
En baissant sa lyre d'un ton,
Chantait auprés de sa maîtresse
Quelques vers sans précision,
Que le plaisir et la paresse
Dictaient sans l'aide d'Apollon.

One should read, too, the jocular, friendly *Epître à M. le duc de Sully* (1720), in which Voltaire erects a monument to the palsied old Chaulieu, shortly before Chaulieu's death.

L'éternel abbé de Chaulieu
Paraîtra bientôt devant Dieu,
Et si d'une muse féconde
Les vers aimables et polis
Sauvent une âme en l'autre monde,
Il ira droit en paradis.

This circle increased young Voltaire's abhorrence of stupidity, his aversion from asceticism and his love of the good things of life. The inclination to pleasure so characteristic of this clique was not in his nature. The old gentlemen who in *Le Temple* originally assembled around the Prince of Vendôme belonged to the time when it was good form to drink the clear and sparkling Vin d'Ay until they rolled under the table. They had no shame whatsoever about going to bed drunk every night. They belonged to the jolly, careless retinue of the Wine-God. Each was a Silenus or a Satyr.

Voltaire, who sat among them and received their blessing in foaming champagne, which corresponded to the wit and exuberance of his wilful young nature, was representative of a younger generation which no longer looked to wine for inspiration. His drink was not wine but coffee, that sobering beverage, which clears the mind instead of clouding it, which does not cause vague dreams, but a clear sight before which shines the truth.

The old and the old-fashioned still liked to accompany their drinking with song. Voltaire substituted conversation, which became a fine art now for the first time because now for the first time the crackle of ideas became audible in the newly founded cafés.

Cafés were introduced in England in the year 1669, in France in the year 1671, but while they never flourished on British soil, except in London, by 1720 there were three hundred of them in Paris, and comparatively as many in the provincial towns. The café killed the old-fashioned inn with its drunkenness and quarreling.

Coffee-drinking engendered wit, intelligent discussion and laughter, not the raucous guffaw of the drunkard, but the infectious laughter that denotes a keenly appreciative sense of humor.

It was said of Voltaire that he lived on fifty cups of coffee daily, and died because of these fifty cups of coffee. This probably originated from the eulogy of Frederick the Great after Voltaire's death, in which he speaks of the pains Voltaire took in writing his last tragedy. "He spent whole nights working it over, and, whether to fight off sleepiness or to stimulate his brain, he unquestionably overdosed himself with coffee. Fifty cups hardly sufficed him."

When Voltaire shortly before his death announced before the French Academy his plan of a dictionary, he drank, five times, two and one-half cups of coffee.

It is certain that coffee symbolizes Voltaire, not wine, still less beer.

3

One can easily imagine what the honest and dignified father Arouet, former notary, now high official, had to say about this idle and aimless life of his younger son, and his company of poets and dukes. Instead of sticking to his law-studies and looking out for his future, the black sheep left the house in the forenoon and did not return until the wee, small hours.

He was the prodigal son in every respect. There is an anecdote, not all of which is reliable but which can safely be trusted this far: the young man had received one hundred *louis d'ors* for a literary work, at that time a fortune in his eyes. Walking through the rue Saint Denis he chanced to notice at an auction

sale a carriage, two horses and several liveries. He bought the complete outfit, employed servants to fill the liveries, had the horses hitched up and put in a blissful day driving about showing his splendor to his friends, until near nightfall the coachman overturned the coach by the rue du Long-Pont. The next day he had to discharge his lackeys and sell carriage and horses to a hackney coachman for half what he had paid for them.

Another entirely credible story tells how his father, exasperated over the night reveling of his son, one evening ordered the house door to be locked and the key to be brought to him. Early the next morning young Arouet comes home from a merry party and finds the door closed and locked. The doorman can give him no better suggestion than to make himself comfortable for the night in a carriage standing in the courtyard. He does so, curls up as well as he can on the seat, and falls asleep. In the morning two very young senators from the Parliament pass by, notice young Voltaire, whom they know, and have him carried by two porters to a café, where the bad jokes of the servants and guests awaken him.

4

It is not surprising that the old man finally saw no other way to rescue his son from all these youthful follies, than to remove him from Paris. So he asked his old acquaintance the Marquis de Chateauneuf (brother of the Abbé, now dead) who was just about to start on a mission to the States-General in The Hague, to take the young man along as some kind of attaché. The unmanageable son had already been sent away to Caen, in Normandy, where his reputation as a poet at once opened for him the way to the best society in town. After a few months at Caen the eighteen-year-old found himself on the way to The Hague.

The Hague was flocked with fugitive Huguenots. Among them was a Madame Dunoyer who with her two daughters had left her husband, after ruining

his respectable position by her folly. He had been a captain in the army, senator, state-deputy, finally grandmaster in charge of state-owned rivers and forests in Languedoc. Madame Dunoyer, though not a beauty, was not the less erotic, the real adventuress, bright, enterprising and bold. Previously, in England, she had lived on an income for which she begged; now in Holland she was trying to make her living by the publication of a periodical called *La Quintessence,* which gave a so-called Chronique of Paris and the Court, and which, though there was hardly one true word in it, did contain various amusing items of gossip and petty scandal. Her older daughter she had married very young to an old man. The younger, Olympe, called Pimpette, still lived with her.

Olympe had a broken engagement in her history. Jean Cavalier, one of the leaders of the rebellion in the Cevennes, suppressed by the Maréchal de Villars, was received with splendor in England and had been caught by Madame Dunoyer. When it came out that he not only had no money but was also deep in debt, she enabled him to pay his debts to the officers of his regiment by selling the diamonds she had taken when she left her husband. He became engaged to Olympe and gave the mother a signed marriage-contract. But after an engagement of two years, he disappeared and made a better match with an English girl.

Soon after his arrival in The Hague young Arouet was introduced in the very open house of Madame Dunoyer and immediately fell passionately in love for the first time. Olympe promptly reciprocated and did not let her young admirer yearn in vain. They saw each other daily and were both very happy.

The practical mother knew at once that this nineteen-year-old Arouet, without position and without income, was no husband for her Pimpette, and could only compromise her and make a later marriage more difficult to arrange. As soon as she got wind of the affair she went at once to the Ambassador and asked him to stop the damage that the over-frequent visits of the young attaché would undoubtedly do her daughter's reputation.

The Marquis de Châteauneuf decided to take the matter in hand at once, partly because he respected Madame Dunoyer's nuisance-value as a scandal-monger in *La Quintessence,* partly because he was afraid that the States-General might see an uncalled for proselytism in the eagerness of his Catholic page to win this Protestant girl; the more so because it was known that M. Dunoyer was interested in restoring his daughter to the Catholic faith.

In the evening when the young François Arouet came home, he was told that the Ambassador wanted to see him at once. Without any preparation he received the shocking intelligence that he was to return instantly to France. With difficulty he was able to gain a delay of twenty-four hours and that only on condition that he should not leave the house.

In spite of the alarming suddenness of it all he at once resolved not to give in. All night his fertile mind was working out a plan: he would get a note into Pimpette's hands proposing that they elope together and join M. Dunoyer in France. First of all it was important to ascertain a means of corresponding in the short time left the lovers.

By a strange bit of luck we still possess fourteen of the letters young Arouet wrote Olympe—perhaps all he wrote—in spite of the urgent plea expressed in each of them that they be burned. This is explained by the fact that Olympe's enterprising mother, after doing everything in her power to break up the attachment of the two young people and after getting possession of the letters, resolved to turn them to some use and, in 1720, that is, seven years later, published them in the fifth volume of her collection *Lettres Historiques et Galantes,* omitting only the unflattering references which the young lover in his exasperation and contempt had made to herself. When we recall that the reason at the bottom of this severe treatment of the nineteen-year-old youth was the French Ambassador's fear of the poisonous pen of Madame Dunoyer we must admit that she amply justified this fear.

It is fortunate that these letters have been preserved. Here, and here only, we become acquainted

with young Voltaire as a lover and as a lover so young and so naïve that he has not the slightest doubt his love will endure all his life. What is quite touching, is that the young woman to whom he feels himself so passionately drawn, is just as much in love as he and just as desperate at the prospect of their separation. How much it means that this young passion could not survive a forced separation!

These letters are all the more interesting in that they are the only love letters of Voltaire left. Madame du Châtelet collected no fewer than eight quarto volumes filled with Voltaire's letters to her. According to Abbé de Voisenon there can hardly be any doubt that Saint-Lambert burned those letters after her death, in posthumous jealousy—as he later burned the letters of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

We can follow the mind of the young lover during that first night of the calamitous news, in 1713. Three letters of introduction he must have from Olympe, one to her father, one to her uncle, and one to her married sister. Above all, the one to her sister is absolutely essential. The bearer of these letters to Voltaire is to be Olympe's family shoemaker. He must hold a last in hand to explain his coming, as though he had to repair the young man's shoes. He must bring him a note from Olympe and her portrait. She must induce her mother to hand it over. It would be safer in his hands than in those of her ill-disposed mother. The servant he is sending is absolutely dependable. In order to be admitted he will pretend to be a manufacturer of tobacco cases and as he is a Norman he will act his rôle excellently. Now François must bring his letter to a close. On oath he protests his tenderness toward her, the tenderness she fully deserves. He knows well that even the least faithful lovers speak that way; but their love is not, like his, founded upon absolute respect. . . .

"Once more, farewell, my dear beloved! Think a little of your unhappy lover, but don't think of him in a way that will make you sad; take care of your health if you want to have me keep mine. Above all things, be very careful, burn my letters, and all letters which you receive from me in the future; it is

better to have less tenderness for me and more cautiousness for yourself. Let's console ourselves with the hope of seeing each other again soon and let's love each other all our lives!"

The journey was put off for a short while; they could not find at once a suitable companion and guard for the young man; but he was held prisoner in the Embassy in the name of the King. The next day he wants to try to see her; they can rob him of his life, but not of the love he has for her. "Yes, my adorable beloved, I want to see you tonight, even though I may have to lay my head on the block." He will steal out of the house, he will rent a carriage, he will meet her when the moon shines, and they will drive like a gale, to Scheveningen.

Nothing came of it. Both were too carefully watched. But the next day a new plan: about midnight he will climb out of the window; she will at the same time, under the pretense of a natural desire to be alone, leave her mother's bed (the poor girl slept in the same bed as her mother) and they will meet at any spot she designates. Neither did anything come of that.

But the following day he has thought up a new and still better scheme. She must send Lisette to him at three o'clock. He will have prepared a package containing a man's suit. If then she will be so gracious as to allow a poor prisoner, who adores her, the favor of seeing her, she will come at dawn to the Embassy and he may hope to receive her in his little residence. The joy of being her slave will then make him forget his imprisonment. He has thought of everything; since his clothes are known, they must not be seen. He adds an overcoat under which she can hide his tightly fitting coat and cloak her face. She must mistrust everybody, her mother, even herself. But she must trust him without the least reservation. He will pull her out of the abyss, etc.

This plan succeeded, and the next letter rings with jubilation and wanton delight, like a love scene from Shakespeare. They forget their danger and their imminent separation in their happiness at being able to kiss and embrace each other in perfect secrecy.

"I don't know whether to call you Monsieur or Mademoiselle; you are charming in woman's attire, but you are also a most delightful cavalier, and our doorman, who is not in love with you, considers you a charming boy. The next time you come he will give you an excellent reception. You achieved the fiercest as well as the most graceful aspect of the cavalier, and I almost fear that you drew your sword on the street to make the young man complete." This brings to his mind the disguised Viola in *Twelfth Night*. In his joy the poet turns to semi-mythological verses, according to the custom of that time:

Enfin je vous ai vu, charmant objet que j'aime,
En cavalier déguisé dans ce jour;
J'ai cru voir Vénus elle-même
Sous la figure de l'Amour.
L'Amour et vous, vous êtes du même âge,
Et sa mère a moins de beauté;
Mais malgré ce double avantage
J'ai reconnu bientôt la vérité.
Olympe, vous êtes trop sage
Pour être une divinité.

And he disparages gods and goddesses, just to show how high she stands above them.

That same evening he wants to jump out of the window to be at the appointed place at dawn. His servant will come at four o'clock. "If I am not there by then I am absolutely prevented from coming."

But no, he surmounted all obstacles, he came and they saw each other once more.

The next letter, however, contains the bitter suspicion that the meeting of the previous day had been found out. M. de La Bruyère has gone to her mother and blabbed. And now, because of his fear that it may hurt her reputation, it is impossible for him to see her again before his departure. Nothing is left to them but correspondence. He will write to her by every mail to a certain safe address; his own address is: A M. Arouet, *le cadet, chez M. Arouet, Trésorier de la chambre des comptes, cour du Palais, à Paris.* Then follows a great deal of advice as to how she should deal with her mother: how allay her suspicions, how never mention his name, how lull her into tranquil-

lity of mind until the day of liberation should arrive: "My dear Pimpette, just follow my advice now and compensate yourself all the rest of my life, I promise always to obey you."

But all hope is not gone yet. François Arouet had been misinformed. This we learn from the only letter of Olympe Dunoyer which is still in existence.

"Uncertain as I am whether I shall have the pleasure of seeing you tonight, I inform you that it was not M. de La Bruyère, who was at our house yesterday. It was an error of the shoemaker's wife, who alarmed us very inopportunely and without reason. My mother does not know that I spoke to you, and believes—thank Heaven!—that you have already departed. I don't want to speak to you about my health; that troubles me least of all, and I think far too much of you to have the time to think about myself. I assure you, my dear heart, that, were I able to doubt your tenderness, I would welcome illness; my dear child, even life itself would be a burden to me, if I had not the sweet hope of being loved by the one dearest to me in this world.

"Do what you can so I can see you tonight. Just go down to the shoemaker's kitchen and I guarantee you will have nothing to fear; for our quintessence manufacturess thinks you half-way between here and Paris. So, if you want, I'll have the pleasure of seeing you tonight; and if this can't be done, let me go to Mass in the Embassy. I then will ask M. de La Bruyère to show me the chapel; ladies are privileged to be curious. Then I'll ask him, quite incidentally, if nothing had been heard of you and when you went away. Don't deny me this favor, my dear Arouet, for I ask you this in the name of the greatest tenderness, that is in the name of the love which I feel for you. Farewell, sweet child! I adore you and I swear to you that my love will last as long as my life. Dunoyer."

As one can see, Olympe speaks as if she were the older of the two, which, however, was not the case, and her words give evidence of her keen resolve and honest affection.

There are still in existence a number of warm letters addressed to Pimpette from the road and from

Paris, and we can follow the numerous steps which young Voltaire undertook to enable Olympe to leave her mother and come back to her father. But how little a dependent young man of nineteen years can do! How little, especially under paternal surveillance and under the judicial conditions of that time!

When he had scarcely arrived in Paris, young François was informed that a letter had preceded him from the Marquis de Châteauneuf, written "as if it were concerned with a criminal." François' father, to whom this was the last straw, secured a *lettre de cachet* for the arrest of his son. He had to go into hiding until his friends succeeded in calming the first storm of paternal ire. He writes to Olympe that at first his father wanted to send him to the West Indies; later, however, he changed his mind; but his friends cannot shake his father's determination to disinherit him. For Olympe, writes her lover, there is only one thing left to do: depart as soon as she gets her father's order: "You love me, my dear Olympe, and you know how I love you; my love surely deserves to be returned. . . . If you were cruel enough to fling all my bad fortune in my face by stubbornly staying in Holland, I should kill myself at the first word of it."

5

The strict father wasted no time; he put his poetic, love-sick son to work in a lawyer's office. Maître Alain had his office in the rue Pavée-Saint-Bernard near the Place Maubert. Meanwhile, the elder Arouet intercepted Olympe's letters, the angry mother in The Hague those of François. For the next succeeding months the two young people changed their receiving addresses constantly. Then the grand passion lost one of its principals. Olympe fell in love with a seventeen-year-old Frenchman in The Hague, Guyot de Merville, who twenty years later became one of Voltaire's most ardent opponents. An extreme case of retro-active jealousy.

Merville, however, was just as unsuitable a match

as Arouet. Madame Dunoyer now began to move mountains to pave the way for a provident marriage for her daughter. She shortly succeeded in making Olympe the Countess Winterfeld. But since the mother's ambition, not the daughter's heart, brought about this union, the young countess soon left her husband and, having no other refuge, returned to her mother. Shortly afterward (1719) the mother died, whereupon the Countess Winterfeld left Holland and went to her relatives in France.

Voltaire was so far from bearing any grudge against his fickle first love that in 1721 he secretly helped her out of a pecuniary embarrassment. Wherever he mentions her in his later works it is with respect and warmth.

Her fortunes improved. Her father left her nothing but debts, but her uncle was very rich, and when he died she inherited his fine house in the Faubourg St. Antoine and bought herself a country estate.

Replying to La Beaumelle's slander of her, Voltaire wrote, in his *Supplement to the Century of Louis XIV*: "She gets a pension from the King and lives most of the time at her estate where she takes care of the poor of the vicinity. Her age, her meritorious life, her virtues, the large and honored family of which she is a member, and her high connections should protect her from the infamous slander of this foolish scoundrel."

The last mention of her name occurs in two letters written by Voltaire from Cirey, dated respectively July 16 and 30, 1736, in which he asks his friend the Abbé Moussinot to purchase a little writing-table with a screen and have it sent in his name to Madame de Winterfeld, rue Platrière, near the Sisters of St. Agnes.

Thus the forty-two-year-old man tried by a little gift to recall himself to the memory of the lady whom as a fiery nineteen-year-old boy he had loved.

Apparently the stay in a lawyer's office, boring as it was for the young poet, was not lost time. His extraordinary brain easily absorbed the greater part of judiciary methods, also judiciary tricks and subterfuge, ignorance of which would have been a drawback to the future businessman. Later, when he

amassed with such speed and assurance a very considerable fortune, he probably owed it to his early acquired familiarity with this kind of judicial practice.

At the law-office he found a young colleague who became his constant companion for the longest part of his life. Nicolas Claude Thiriot remained, to the time of his death in 1772, Voltaire's most intimate and familiar friend, his trusted helper in many youthful affairs. There may have been some charm about his personality. Certain it is that he has nothing of this appeal for posterity. Few people in history have known as well as he how to make a paying thing of friendship with a celebrity. Voltaire's letters to him extend from 1721 to 1772, and during all this time he showed himself to be lazy, undependable, dishonest, treacherous, even fraudulent, and deviously extortionate in the price he set on every little service. Yet in 1769, fifty-five years after the beginning of their acquaintance, he turned to Voltaire with a request for financial support. To posterity, his name is connected indissolubly with that of his famous friend.

6

In this period comes Voltaire's first contact with the theater and its world. He had written the first draft of his tragedy *Œdipe,* a rather curious work for such a young poet, and now his obsession was his hope of seeing the play accepted at the Théâtre Français. The way to accomplish that was first to ingratiate himself with the actors and actresses. The latter had the stronger attraction and the greater influence. But because of his knowledge of the old Greek tragedy and out of a sane poetic and critical disinclination to inject into the play any modern love element, he purposely omitted sex interest. His play was declined by the actors, who could not see beyond this defiance of an old tradition.

His attempt to win over one of the young leading ladies, Mademoiselle Duclos, was a complete failure. She preferred the Count of Uzès. There was nothing

to do according to the custom of the eighteenth century but to take his defeat lightly and to make a joke of it.

In his epistle to Madame Monbran-Villafranche, 1714, he says:

Nous semons pour autrui. J'ose bien vous le dire,
Mon cœur de la Duclos fut quelque temps charmé;
L'amour en sa faveur avait monté ma lyre;
Je chantais la Duclos; d'Uzès en fut aimé;
C'était bien la peine d'écrire.

In his letter of July, 1715, he is bolder: "By the way, talking of theatre ladies, I must report that La Duclos hardly acts any longer; every morning she takes a few pinches of mustard and cinnamon, every night a few pinches of the Count d'Uzès." He could not abstain from making a malicious allusion to the health of the lady. This he couches cleverly in the following verse:

Belle Duclos,
Vous charmez toute la nature!
Belle Duclos,
Vous avez les dieux pour rivaux;
Et Mars tendrait l'aventure,
S'il ni craignait le dieu Mercure,
Belle Duclos.

The beautiful and noble Adrienne Lecouvreur succeeded La Duclos as the object of his adoration, and for a short time became more than a friend.

To her he dedicated the earliest of his *Contes en vers* which had been written in the first place for La Duclos: *l'Anti-Giton,* a satire on homosexuals directed against a certain prominent man, the Marquis de Courcillon. These individuals later formed an influential group, as they did in Germany about 1900. To Lecouvreur he also dedicated his 29th epistle, which glorifies her as an actress; he has Melpomene contribute her taste, sensitivity, pathos and delicacy, Venus donates her charm and graciousness and finally Cupid bestows the capacity for love, the active capacity for love and only with this last gift does she become perfect as an actress. To her, furthermore, he addresses in 1719 the short poem, a farewell, which seems to

contain a hint of her passion for some one else, and that in a way which equally honors Voltaire and her:

> Faites le bien d'un seul et le désir de tous;
> Et puissent vos amours égaler la durée
> De la pure amitié que mon cœur a pour vous!

In 1730, he wrote the touching poem, *La Mort de Mlle. Lecouvreur,* in which he expresses his bitter hatred of French prejudice and French cruelty as evidenced by the refusal of a grave to the great artist.

In addition to being turned down by the Théâtre Français and scorned by Duclos, the young man met a third depressing rebuff. This was from the French Academy, which made him bow the first time, but not in the end.

In the year 1712 L'Académie Français had instituted a contest for a prize, first offered by Louis XIII and renewed by Louis XIV. The prize was for the best lyric poem in the form of an ode on the performance of the chorus of Notre Dame de Paris. This problem cannot be called exactly alluring; it required a glorification of the King's piety; consequently it was bound to lack poetic appeal. Surely no one will try to maintain that this theme was suited to the poetic gift of young Arouet who was induced by his ambition to try for the prize.

He had composed just one ode in all his life. That was when, at the age of fifteen, he performed the exercise of translating into French verse one of his hated teacher Father Lejay's Latin hymns to St. Géneviève. Curiously enough, he later wished to disown this little work which does credit to his skill at verse making. The ode he now composed in honor of the two Louis on the chorus of Notre Dame is written in the same high and mighty style which Jean Baptiste Rousseau had introduced in his equally cold and pompous religious hymns.

In its melody as well as in its cadence this ode anticipates Victor Hugo's first *Odes et Ballades,* except that Voltaire's work is damaged by those hideous allegories—those infernal allegories that weigh down every eighteenth century art, even including

sculpture: allegories such as Peace, Piety, Faith, Malevolence, Insolence and Rebellion—no matter how mellifluous the verse, the image is killed by them.

Even so, it is no exaggeration to say that this ode by a youth of eighteen is as good as any that were composed at the time. It has the same significance in Voltaire's life that Goethe's *Gedanken über Jesu Christi Höllenfahrt* has in his.

Two full years passed before a decision was reached. In the year 1714 the young poet was informed that the prize had been awarded by the well-known Academician, Monsieur de la Motte-Houssard to the old Abbé Dujarry, whose verses certainly could not even approach those of Arouet. They were flat and prosaic until they attempted to soar, when they became simply ridiculous. For example, the Abbé whose *forte* was obviously not geography, maintains that the South Pole is hot as the North Pole is cold.

> Poles glacés, brûlants, où sa gloire connue
> Jusqu'aux bornes du monde est chez vous parvenue.

Although Voltaire joked about his defeat and would not admit that he felt hurt by it, that he was hurt is clearly proved by his next violently exaggerated satire, *Le Bourbier,* in which he roasts La Motte with a ferocity which he found reason to regret when he saw La Motte's unresentful and indulgent attitude toward him. The sneering bitterness in this satire, resembles that of Byron in his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,* which overshot the mark just as far and which was passed over with similar indulgence by those it attacked.

Those narrative poems written by Arouet in his early youth (1714-1716), the already mentioned *L'Anti-Giton,* and *Le Cadenas* and *Le Cocuage* are very doubtful works of art when we look at them today, were it only because of their style of attack. Similarly distasteful to many modern readers is the poet's careless worldly manner. For his contemporaries, however, the wit of these verses gave them

justification. These poems are analogous to those written by Goethe at eighteen, a little over fifty years later, in his collection *Annette.* The only difference is that Voltaire's poems touch upon indecent matters in the most delicate language, while those of Goethe, more sensual and rather doctrinal, postulate frivolity as a rule or duty. But, although these poems found favor in the eyes of the frivolous society of the Court, to the poet's father they were final proof that his errant son was completely degenerate.

7

In these circumstances it was fortunate that the young genius had a protector. It was the distinguished and highly gifted Urbain de Caumartin who by entreaty got his father's permission to take the young man to his château of Sainte-Ange, near Fontainebleau. Here François moved in the best society of the time. Here he wrote some of his first, keen poetic epistles in which he nonchalantly treats France's most prominent men as his comrades, flattering and scolding them at the same time, regardless of the fact that they were a half-century his seniors. To this Sainte-Ange period belongs the *Epistle to the Prince of Vendôme* in which he describes how the gallant King Francis I, who had in his time amused himself in this garden with Diane de Poitiers and with la belle Ferronière, appeared before him clad in laurel and myrtle and without any other crown than that which is awarded by an illness proceeding from Venus.

> Quelque lauriers sur sa personne,
> Deux brins de myrte dans ses mains
> Etaient ses atours les plus vains,
> Et de vérole quelques grains
> Composaient toute sa couronne.

But the amazing part is the description which young Arouet has Francis I give of the Grand Prior of Vendôme. The King draws the Prior's attention to all the things they have in common, without failing

to mention a detail: Love of the fine arts, abhorrence of bigotry, dependability in every field except the erotic, and finally the disease which, he hopes, will not bring death to the prince, as it has him, but will yield to a few ounces of mercury.

Il aime comme moi les arts
Et les beaux vers par préférence;
Il sait de la dévote engeance
Comme moi faire peu de cas;
Hors en amour, en tous les cas
Il tient, comme moi, sa parole;
Mais enfin, ce qu'il ne sait pas,
Il a comme moi, la vérole.

The young Duke de Sully had, as mentioned before, an uncle, Abbé Servien, who was one of the veterans of the epicurean circle and apparently was honestly admired by Voltaire for his cheerfulness, grace, liberalism, and freethinking although on the other hand the young man was disgusted by the old man's unbecoming, sometimes perverted passions. Servien had exhibited a certain spitefulness by protesting vigorously against an over-nasty insinuation in a prologue performed in honor of the old Louis XIV at the Opera where he was, hands and nose buried in his muff, a regular spectator. The result was a *lettre de cachet* which expelled him from Paris. Soon after he had been allowed to return, another *lettre de cachet* reached him and this time it sent him to the prison of Vincennes for a term of twenty months. What was back of this second *lettre de cachet* is unknown, but undoubtedly it was some unsavory sexual excess. He was freed only after the King's death, when the Regent took over the government and called to the young Duke de Sully who had come to do him homage: "I did not forget about the Abbé."

From this period there are two poems of Voltaire's on Servien. The long epistle consoles him most charmingly over his imprisonment and recommends to him a brave philosophy of life: "The philosopher is free, even in chains." Here it is surprising that the young poet dares to glorify Fouquet, the great financier who had been removed from office because of his frauds. At this time Voltaire still regarded him as

martyr to the fickle temperament of autocracy. The second poem *A M. l'abbé de . . .* by which Servien is understood, has as a subtitle: "who mourned the death of his beloved."

In a lightly satirical and jesting vein it advises the epicurean man of God with the triple chin, not to take so deeply to heart the death of his beloved, that he himself must eventually go to the grave, and it expresses the Anacreontic philosophy of life, which is not high-minded but honest.

> Voila comme on doit sans cesse
> Faire tête au sort irrité:
> Et la véritable sagesse
> Est de savoir fuir la tristesse
> Dans les bras de la volupté.

The abbé did not have much occasion to profit by these suggestions: he died the following year, 1716. He had been a typical figure among the steady guests of *Le Temple,* of whom so many, from the Grand Prior and Chaulien down to the Abbé de Servien were libertines in both the meanings the word had at that time. High livers as well as freethinkers, but freethinkers in theory only, who, far from wishing the destruction of the Church, received their income from it. They mocked its religion but grabbed its money and jumped at the ecclesiastic sinecures that bought them worldly luxuries.

8

It is sometimes said that at the accession of the Regent, the spirit of *Le Temple* became the spirit of France. This, however, would give us too narrow a view of the new times.

Louis XIV died on September 1, 1715. This King, whose name had been celebrated like no other French one, toward the end of his reign so squeezed his country that the report of his death was welcomed with joy and his burial gave rise to scandalous celebrations. He left a country, strangled and bled by the Church, with a national debt of two billions of livres,

with a foreign policy that produced nothing but defeats, and a system of domestic government that bred helplessness.

The Regent, Philippe d'Orléans, who (as guardian of the five-year-old heir to the throne) succeeded him, the son of Monsieur, Louis XIV's vicious brother, and of the Bavarian princess Elisabeth Charlotte, was thoroughly competent. He had shown unusual courage in his youth during the war with the Netherlands. He had during the War of the Spanish Succession held the chief command in Italy and in the years 1707 and 1708 the high command in Spain. He lost the latter when it developed that he sought the Spanish crown for himself. In spite of the fact that he had not been mentioned in the will of Louis XIV he was recognized by the Parliament as Regent with full royal power.

But if France was to be put on her feet again it would require a fundamental revolution which was resisted with all their power by the upper classes and which the people could not force, weakened by misery and held down by the tax-free classes as they were.

The first essential move would have been to call back the banished Protestants; they were industrious, reasonable and prosperous. They would have brought with them a stream of gold and what, as Michelet says, would be still better: a stream of young blood. But it proved impossible. None in the circle of the Regent wished to be taken for a protector of heresy, or to assume the burden of a general hatred. Not even the Jansenists, who had been supplanted by the Jesuits and suppressed by Louis XIV, showed the least sympathy for the Protestants. Even so enlightened a man as the Duke de Saint-Simon, who was very close to the Regent, hedged about with his conservative and Catholic prejudices, had nothing but condemnation for the expelled Huguenots.

Just as impossible of accomplishment proved to be any adequate financial reform. Colbert had already proposed a progressive income tax. But the idea of collecting taxes from nobility and clerics seemed so extremely insolent that even the common

people were aroused against it by the privileged class.

In these dire straits it was resolved to hold a strict investigation of all outstanding loans. The Prime Minister, the Duc de Noaille, founded a *Chambre de Justice*. Charges brought before this tribunal disclosed the fact that financiers had done business with the late king as usurers do with young men of prominent families: they had loaned him sums at interest up to four hundred per cent; but as though that were not bad enough, the accounts had been so poorly kept that there were a large number of duplicate items, double bills. The tax collectors withheld their collections from the internal revenue-office under the pretense of expenses incurred and gambled with the money in the stock market.

The Regent's demand for at least enough money to give the soldiers their pay was agreed to, but the promise was not kept; and when finally the Regent lost patience and threatened torture and the scaffold, it appeared that a large number of prominent men and fine ladies were interested in the finances. The ladies showed themselves especially active and the Regent had to give in.

More successful was an extensive revision (*le grand visa*) of securities, interest-bearing papers, etc.; it was made by four keen financiers, the brothers Pâris, whose name often recurs in the histories of these times, especially frequently in Voltaire's.

The elder Pâris used to keep an inn, "A la Montagne," at the foot of the Alps, in the management of which he was helped by his four stalwart sons. When, in the year 1710, a commissary of provisions sought a short passage over the Alps in order to bring victuals to the Duc de Vendôme in Italy, the father told him that his sons knew every mountain pass and would deliver the provisions. This was done and as a reward they got positions in the commissary department. Since they had inborn business acumen, were active, and congenial and like the brothers Rothschild a hundred years later, acted in conformity to a common plan, they were successful.

For a period they were completely supplanted by John Law, but after his downfall they rose again.

In 1722 the oldest, who called himself Pâris-Duverney, was made Royal Treasurer. He was an extraordinarily able banker. Put under the ministry of the Duke de Bourbon, he made the mistake of allying his fate to that of the Duke's and that of the Duke's mistress, Madame de Prie. So when Bourbon fell into disgrace, he fell with him. In the year 1730 they again won the royal favor. The oldest brother became the founder of the military school in Paris, while the youngest, Pâris de Montmartel, gained such power as treasurer and Court banker that for the next generation he conducted the finances of the kingdom all by himself. No finance official could be employed or discharged without his consent.

But we have run far ahead of our story.

By 1716 the brothers had succeeded in reducing the national debt by half. Simultaneously the dissolute but skilled Abbé Dubois eliminated the threat of war with England. France abandoned the forlorn cause of the Old Pretender and in November, 1716, France and England formed an alliance which later was joined by Holland. Dubois earned his coveted reward—a cardinal's hat.

At the same time he made another—soon widely known—alliance with the Scotchman John Law, the financial wizard of the age, a combination of the magician and the gambler, generously endowed by Nature with the qualities of both. He had the resourceful brain which finds simple but amazing solutions for every difficulty. Gracious, winning, extremely handsome, with an almost feminine beauty, he had absolute confidence in himself. A regency of eighteen months had used up all of Philippe d'Orléans original zeal for reform; but John Law had will-power enough for them both.

He founded a bank which demanded of its stockholders only one-quarter of their subscription in gold; for the balance it accepted the paper *billets d'Etat,* which had been almost worthless since their issue. Industry and commerce now began to look up. The notes issued by his bank became of constant value, not subject to the ruinous fluctuations of most other French money. The stockholders conducted the bank

in a businesslike manner. Not more than fifty million notes were issued in the course of two years.

In August, 1717, the State went to this bank for direct help and expressed the desire to take it over. The Regent appealed to Law for support, dreamed of extortions, coercive proceedings, sequestrations such as the Austrian Government had resorted to in founding the Austrian State bank. Law wouldn't hear of such a thing; instead he planned to exploit the new France. Canada and Louisiana, and he organized *La Compagne d'Occident.* But though this company was founded with a nominal capital of 100,000,000 livres the subscription was paid in state notes so far below par that the total was worth only about 25,000,000. And he did not receive even this amount, but a yearly payment of four million, which was to be paid for the first year only. In the second year this four million was to be divided among the stockholders. It was remarkable about this prophet of the stock market, this "Ossian of Finance," that at bottom he was dependable and sound; he saw beyond money and securities, he knew perfectly well that the wealth of a country is fundamentally dependent upon its natural resources and the industry and prosperity of its population. He wanted to go to work practically and slowly. But all the ventures which he proposed and undertook, and whose successful execution demanded time, were precipitated because of the desperate financial condition. He himself was robbed of everything when the members of the house of Condé asked for and secured the sudden withdrawal of their huge investment. In the year 1600 the house of Condé had an annual income of twelve thousand livres; by 1700 this had become one million, eight hundred thousand livres and in 1718 over and above all this it received immense yearly pensions.

On more than one occasion Law was the victim of virtual betrayal, as for instance when d'Argenson. the father of the two contemporaries of Voltaire, who had posed as Law's friend, went over to his enemies and allied himself with a commercial company which was a competitor of Law. D'Argenson, to be sure, did not have the effrontery to enter commercial

transactions in his own name while he was minister; but under the name of his valet he transferred to himself the salt-taxes and the interest on state funds.

There was only one step left: complete transfer of Law's bank into the hands of the State. The King made himself banker and flooded the country with paper money which was forced upon the population as were the *assignats* later under the Revolution. This took place in December, 1718.

Law had seen his dream realized: abolition of the terrible tax system and of the scavengers who misappropriated the state income, dismissal of at least forty thousand superfluous officials, and finally the taking over of the state debt under a plan by which he would lend the State fifteen hundred million livres at three per cent and pay its creditors with his stock; for this was still rising and would have realized, had it been sold a month later, a very considerable surplus. Hardly had he been made Controller-General when he submitted a plan to the Council of State to force the clergy to sell everything they had acquired within the last one hundred and twenty years. This idea was a complete revolution in itself, a 1789 seventy years before its time.

One can imagine what tremendous forces were set in motion to bring about his downfall, and what a little push was needed to topple over his house of cards. A run on the bank with the people standing in a queue the whole length of the rue de Richelieu, a run on Law, with the blunt Duke de Bourbon, France's future ruler, demanding twenty million livres of him within one month, for his friend Madame de Prie. He was abandoned by the Regent, who now had a permanent headache, caused by nightly carousals and an apoplectic stroke which left him in such a lassitude that he could no longer be aroused even by the greedy women who offered themselves to him.

But still Law held his head above water, and still proved his usefulness, by doing away with all tariff walls between the various provinces of France. Corn and merchandise were shipped duty-free. No longer was grain to rot in one province while in the next was

famine. Also an artisan was permitted to settle wherever he chose. A carpenter from Lyons was henceforth at liberty to practise his trade in Paris.

But what good was all this when the bottom was slipping from under everything and when the artificially inflated stocks began to fall and fall. All the mortal enemies he had made, the pious to whom he was the Anti-Christ, the members of the Parliament who loathed him because he had spoken against the sale of offices and against the Sovereign's right of life and death, all these stirred up a storm of hatred against Law, who was called the cause of France's ruin. They wanted to hang him, to tear him to pieces. Unselfish, as he had always been, he had established a trust fund for his wife, equal to the income from the money he had originally brought with him to France. For himself, he rescued nothing. He fled in poverty, in 1720, to save his life, and six years later, in Venice, he died—still in poverty.

9

Voltaire, being in intimate touch with all the enemies both of the Regent and of Law, naturally viewed the Scotchman and what he called his system in an unfavorable light. Numerous passages in both verse and prose furnish evidence of this.

In the epistle to the Duke de Sully he says:

> Je me fais un plaisir extrême
> De parler, sur la fin du jour,
> De vers, de musique et d'amour,
> Et pas un seul mot du système,
> De ce système tant vanté,
> Par qui nos héros de finance
> Emboursent l'argent de la France,
> Et le tout par pure bonté!

In a letter to Thiriot, written in 1725, Voltaire quotes a number of verses he had composed on the Duke d'Orléans and on the Marquis, which he intended to weave into the sixth canto of his *Henriade* but they never were inserted. Among them are the following lines:

Philippe, garde-toi des prodiges pompeux
Qu'on offre à ton esprit trop plein du merveilleux,
Un Ecossais arrive et promet l'abondance;
Il parle, il fait changer la face de la France,
Des trèsores inconnus se forment sous ses mains,
L'or devient méprisable aux avides humains,
Le pauvre qui s'endort au sein de l'indigence,
Des rois, à son reveil, égale l'opulence,
Le riche en un moment voit fuir devant ses yeux
Tous les biens qu'en naissant il eut de ses aïeux.

In the third canto of the *Pucelle* Voltaire again strikes at Law. Even as an old man (1769) he speaks in his *Epistle to Boileau* with stiff hatred of the Scotch financier:

Un maudit Ecossais, chassé de son pays,
Vint changer tout en France, et gâta nos esprits.

In his *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV* he describes how Law drew public attention away from politics by awakening an inordinate desire for money, and thus broke the opposition against the Regent. The gambling fever drove out ambition. Law became the savior of the Regent. Law actually did contribute something. He was responsible for the foundation of vast commercial enterprises, and brought about the regeneration of the Transoceanic Trading Company which had been founded by Colbert and later destroyed by the war. Even though many private ventures failed, the nation as a whole entered with more confidence into large affairs and thus increased its wealth.

Voltaire gives a dispassionate account of how Law founded his bank and united it with the Mississippi company, how the public, taken by the prospect of quick profits, bought and bought these stocks, which rose immensely, and how France became wealthy on paper. In all walks of life one could attain a certain luxury. When the King took over the bank the stock rose to as much as twenty times its par value. But intoxicated at the success of his system, Law issued so many certificates that the supposed value of the stock in 1719 exceeded by eighty-fold all of the money current in France. Law himself, meanwhile, had turned from a Scotchman into a Frenchman, from an

adventurer into a powerful landowner, from a banker into a state minister. "I myself," says Voltaire, "have seen him enter the halls of the Palais Royal, accompanied by dukes and peers, by bishops and marshals of France."

Then Voltaire bestows his praise upon the four brothers Pâris, who after Law's disappearance restored order to the finances of France.

10

The Grand Prior of Vendôme had returned to Paris without waiting to receive permission. So confident was he that he set out as soon as he had heard of the death of Louis XIV. Directly after his arrival he again became the center of his old circle. His first act was to send a summons to the Abbé de Chaulieu; then he gathered all his friends and drinking companions around him in *Le Temple.* All of these were old men, except a few like young Arouet, who quickly became intimately acquainted with the Prince; but age meant nothing to these creatures of iron and fire. It was a free-thinking, hard-drinking, copper-stomached crowd of *bon vivants* that gathered in *Le Temple*—although most of them held clerical titles and made their living by the altar which they did not serve. They could drink and make merry all night long without any bad effect on their health. And amid all this drinking and ribald joking came frequent disputes over literature and poetry in which they showed the finest judgment and surest taste.

Voltaire, who had been working two years on his tragedy *Œdipe,* read it after supper to these gentlemen and derived profit from their criticism. On June 20, 1716, he writes to Chaulieu:

"I well remember the critical objections raised by the Grand-Prior and yourself at the time of a certain dinner given by the Abbé de Bussy. This dinner was of great help to my tragedy, and I believe that all I need to insure the success of anything I am writing is to drink four or five times with you."

The young Prince of Conti, too, gave him good advice, as Voltaire tells us in the fifth of the letters which comprise the introduction to *Œdipe*:

"I must confess that it is to Monseigneur le Prince de Conti that I am indebted for the keenest and finest criticism. If he were a private person, I would be content to admire his judgment, but since his rank as well as his wit make him outstanding, I am venturing to ask him to protect literature."

It was at a dinner given by the Prince, who could write a neat stanza, that young Arouet, not forgetting to emphasize his equality, exclaimed, "Are all of us princes or all of us poets?"

The younger members of this circle advanced quickly in rank; in 1712, the Duke de Sully came into his family estates. At the same time the Abbé de Bussy, who "had no other fault than that he did not believe in God," was made a bishop.

11

The Regent was open-minded and with him a new attitude began to prevail, a battle against the cruel and stupidly pious inquisition of the former Government. He wanted to bring the basic qualities of human beings into their rightful position. In the beginning of his reign he spoke nobly of his desire to have about him not subjects who had to obey blindly, but thinking beings to whom he could explain the underlying motives of his orders, and prove that they were just and essential. What he had in his inmost heart was the real French spirit. This vicious man with his fatal weakness for women and wine was made of the same stuff as Montaigne and Molière.

His reign marks hypocrisy's downfall and liberalism's accession to the throne in more than one sense of the word. All that frivolous and shallow eroticism which before had been kept secret, and practised in the "*petites maisons*" by candle-light, was now performed openly, without shame, in one's own house. The late King had once nicknamed Philippe d'Orleans

"*fanfaron de vice,*" one who makes himself out worse than he is.

Certainly in spite of all his debauches he was morally superior to the men and women of highest rank who played the pimp to achieve their own ends, bringing to his bed now comely, experienced sirens, now innocent and charming young girls. The first type he declined with a sort of horror, and from the latter refused to accept any kind of favor unless the young girl offered herself to him freely and willingly.

Louis had forced Philippe of Orléans to marry one of his illegitimate daughters, the Duchess de Blois. It was impossible to refuse anything to the King; he wanted to see his female bastards married to nobility. But when the Duke broke the news to his mother, Madame Elisabeth Charlotte, known in Germany by the pet name Liselotte, she was so enraged by this insult that she slapped her son's face hard enough to shake the furniture and to be heard in other rooms of the Palace of Versailles. This wife became the torture of his life. Always in league with his enemies, she spied for Madame de Maintenon, and disclosed his secrets at every opportunity.

The mistresses of the Duke, who followed each other in rapid succession, the pleasant and unselfish actress, Mlle. Desmares, the Duchess de Mouchy, the Comtess de Parabères, etc., aroused his sensuality, tenderness, generosity, but never his passion. Passionately he loved only one woman in all his life, and she was—tragically enough—his own daughter.

The offspring of the inharmonious union, the young Duchess de Beri, was beautiful, alluring and half-crazy. At her death it was found that her brain was abnormal. From her grandfather, the Sodomite, she had a part of her perverted inheritance; from her grandmother, who, though a healthy animal herself, came from the Bavarian Royal family which was full of insanity, she inherited a haughtiness that almost bordered on the insane. At the same time she was extremely sensual, very touchy and easily moved to tears. Educated by a debauched chambermaid, she abhorred her mother and always lived near her father. The latter studied, etched (a number of

voluptuous etchings, Daphnis and Chloe), received alchemists, financiers, statesmen, and beautiful courtesans, and was as sensitive as his daughter. When he felt too unhappy about his marriage they cried and got drunk together. She was his only friend and companion. When she was an over-developed girl of fourteen and he prematurely surfeited at thirty-five, passion flamed up hotly between them. He always remained her devotee and her slave, and when Louis XIV died she felt herself queen. She was as gifted as she was mad and as mad as she was witty. She took one lover after another, first her Master of the Horse, then her Captain of the Guard, Rion, whom—in spite of the tremendous disparity in position—she wanted to marry. Rion was a stout, conceited, beardless doll, who with the consent of the Duchess appeared as her official lover—husband in all but name. The Regent, to teach him patience, appointed him governor of Cognac and presented him with the best regiment of the army. Rion, however, was a nephew of Lauzun. And had not Lauzun, in spite of every obstacle put in his way by Louis XIV, married the great Mademoiselle? To the duchess Rion was as good as Lauzun, and at her castle La Muette she let him play the rôle of lord of the house.

For the decoration of this castle the Regent gave her the best he had, the best France had: Watteau, appointed painter to the King in 1717 with the official title *peintre des fêtes galantes*. His bewitching love gardens and delicately sketched figures embarking for Cytherea must transform this little castle in the environs of Paris into a worthy shrine for the daughter of the Regent. From Watteau's paintings we learn among other things the costumes of these days. The old, stiff bodice into which, in the time of the old King, women squeezed and laced the upper half of their bodies, while their lower parts disappeared in a hoop-petticoat, had been replaced by loose, light garments which could easily be flung off.

The fountain-head of all intrigues and attacks against the Regent was the Duchess de Maine, grandchild of the famous Condé, who had married the son

of Louis XIV and Madame Montespan. She was a witty and spiteful little lady, Voltaire's protector all her life, but filled with a most vigorous hatred of the Duke d'Orléans. Her husband, who was appointed Regent in Louis XIV's will, had been set aside by Parliament in favor of Orléans. Another member of this circle was the Marshal de Villars, whose wife shortly afterward made a deep impression on the young poet.

It was probably to please the ladies of the little circle in Sceaux and in the castle Villars near Melun that Voltaire wrote his first witty and poisonous verses against the Regent and his daughter. For, the Duchess de Maine was indefatigable in circulating pamphlets, drawings, caricatures and street-songs, in order to sling mud at her rival and his daughter. From her circle came *Les Philippiques,* written by Lagrange-Chancels, odes which took furious flings at the supposed incest. The scandal reached its climax when, in 1718, the Duchess de Berri became pregnant. Not in Sceaux only but all over Europe it was whispered that, even though Rion was supposed to be the father, it was not so. Meanwhile the haughtiness of the young Duchess had developed to an insane degree. She increased her household to eight hundred officers and servants. In the Luxembourg she had a throne built, three steps high, on which she wanted to receive the foreign ambassadors.

That Voltaire in writing his *Œdipe* had in mind the Regent and the Duchess, is betrayed in his first epigram:

> Ce n'est point le fils, c'est le père;
> C'est la fille, et non point la mère;
> A cela près tout va de mieux.
> Ils ont déjà fait Etéocle;
> S'il vient à perdre les deux yeux,
> C'est le vrai sujet de Sophocle.

Here he is anticipating events, for the Duchess had not yet given birth to a child; and when finally it did come it was not a male, so that the name Etéocles is out of place. However, his reference to the danger to the Regent's eyesight has better

foundation. He could hardly see out of one eye, and during a very nasty erotic scene which cannot be told, but in which it seems he was not to blame, the pious young Madame d'Arpajon, lying stretched out in front of him, had kicked him in the eye with her heel.

The other epigram, addressed to the Duchess de Berri, runs:

Enfin votre esprit est guéri
Des craintes du vulgaire;
Belle duchesse de Berri,
Achevez le mystère!

Un nouveau Lot vous sert d'époux,
Mère des Moabites:
Puisse bientôt naître de vous
Un peuple d'Ammonites.

Of course these epigrams were anonymous and Voltaire never admitted that they came from his pen, as without doubt they did. He even went so far as to deny these satirical poems, in a very impertinent poem to the Regent himself.

Nevertheless, they were in circulation under his name, and such insults demanded punishment. The Regent himself was so indifferent to gossip and adverse criticism of his person that he never called for the punishment of those responsible; he interfered only when the police proved to him that to let them go untouched was to encourage his enemies. So Voltaire was merely banished from Paris. The place to which he was first exiled was Toul, a boring little town; but at the intercession of old Arouet, François was sent to Sully-sur-Loire where there were family relatives who the father thought would keep some watch over the unruly young man. But from the first day he became the guest of his friend, de Sully, and lived at his family castle, surrounded by the whole circle of epicures and mockers who had settled in this lovely home and made it into a bewitched and bewitching fairy palace. Among the guests were Roussay, Lespar, Périguy, Guiche, the Duke de la Vallière, Madame de Gondrin, née Noailles, the younger Comtess de Toulouse, and Madame de Vrillière, Venus in person.

Among Voltaire's poems, read the beautiful little verse addressed to Madame de Gondrin when her life had been in danger on the Loire. The whole company living in the castle is depicted. Read a second little poem, *Sleepless Night in Sully,* which expresses the poet's joy at having been exiled to such a beautiful castle and in such charming company. One enjoyed conversation; one courted; one went hunting; and the young poet was very happy and at the same time worried at the thought that the world might never hear of his happiness and hence his exile might never be revoked. The only drawback to this stay was that it was compulsory. To prove his innocence he sent the Regent the following impudent verse:

Non, Monseigneur, en vérité,
Ma muse n'a jamais chanté
Ammonites ne Moabites;
Brancas vous répondra de moi,
Un rimeur, sorti des jésuites,
Des peuples de l'ancienne loi
Ne connaît que les Sodomites.

This "Brancas" is Duke Louis Antoine de Brancas-Villars, to whom Voltaire sent a nice letter in which he begged his protection and politely requested him to deliver the long *Epître à Monsieur le duc d'Orléans,* in which by his dignity and his cleverness he tried to put himself in the best light to the Regent.

In the beginning of the epistle he warns the Duke not to hope for universal acknowledgment, in spite of his truly great qualities:

Prince, chéri des dieux, toi qui sers aujourd'hui
De père à ton monarque, à son peuple d'appui;
Toi qui, de tout l'état portant le poids immense,
Immoles ton repos à celui de la France;
Philippe, ne crois point, dans ces jours ténébreux,
Plaire à tous les Français que tu veux rendre heureux.
Aux princes les plus grands, comme aux plus beaux ouvrages,
Dans leur gloire naissante il manque des suffrages.

The Regent should not let himself be discouraged by spiteful critics, but neither, on the other hand, should he let his dull flatterers win him over; he should recognize their selfish motives and remember

that his glory does not depend upon them nor upon the artists glorifying him. Voltaire enumerates all Philippe's attractive qualities, and then interrupts his enumeration to ask how it was, that a man with so many great qualities as the Duke could have lost his fine sense of justice long enough to let himself be persuaded to believe the worst about the humble petitioner. From this epistle the Duke could see how he thought and wrote. How could he think to recognize Voltaire's style in the crude jingles, which the adroit slander of his rivals had ascribed to him?

At the end of the year 1716 he again was given his freedom.

12

The use he made of it was foolish. In his epistle to the Regent he made himself out his adorer; as a matter of fact, the mild and even rather pleasant punishment he had undergone rankled so bitterly that he could hardly mention the Regent's name without anger. Even this would have been all right, if he had only been more careful to whom he spoke; but he was too young not to be talkative and too inexperienced to know that he was surrounded by spies.

He fell in with a very cunning and dangerous police spy and without a suspicion unburdened his heart to him. This was an officer by the name of Beauregard whom he had picked up in his café but whom, to be quite fair, it would have been perfectly possible for him to have met in more select society. With boyish vanity Voltaire not only boasted of the satires he really had written, but also, according to the police record still existing, made himself out as the author of various other poignant *pasquinades* in French or Latin, only one of which was actually from his pen. Circumstantial evidence became all the stronger against Voltaire when, in answer to Beauregard's question as to what the Duke had done to him to cause such hatred, he answered: "What? You don't know what that rascal did to me? He exiled me from Paris because I let the public know that his daughter, Messalina, is a loose woman."

The satirical poem, which thanks to this careless remark was ascribed to him, was entitled *Les J'ai vue,* and its real author was one Antoine Louis Lebrun who was fourteen years older than Voltaire. In it the poet laments the injustice that he has met with everywhere he goes: the prisons filled with good citizens, freedom a thing of the past, righteousness persecuted, people in chains, soldiers in despair and starvation, officials torturing and maltreating whole cities, a devil in woman's attire (Madame de Maintenon) making the laws, etc. That the author was a Jansenist was betrayed by his unrestrained indignation over the demolition of the cloister Port-Royal:

J'ai vu le lieu saint avili,
J'ai vu Port-Royal démoli,
J'ai vu l'action la plus noire
Qui puisse jamais arrivèr:
L'eau de tout l'Océan ne pourrait la laver,
Et nos derniers neveux auront peine à la croire.

Still more outspoken was his hatred of the Jesuits:

J'ai vu l'hypocrite honoré,
J'ai vu c'est dire tout, le jésuite adoré.

The poem finishes: "I have seen this shocking state of affairs and I am not yet twenty years old." Voltaire at that time was about twenty-two and the real author thirty-six; but it was regarded as certain that this poem was his work, as well as the short Latin inscription *Regnante puero.* The latter expresses sincere and bitter hatred, but doubtless comes from Voltaire.

Regnante puero, Veneno et incestis famoso Administrante, Ignaris et instabilibus sonciliis, Instabiliore religione Aerario exhausto, Violate fide publica	When a boy was king and his Regent known as a poisoner and incestuous lover, when the council was ignorant and unstable and religion even more uncertain, when the treasury was empty, the public confidence violated, etc.

It seems that this poem, "What I Have Seen," angered the Regent most particularly, although it

criticized the former Government for which he was not responsible. One day, during a stroll in the garden of the Palais Royal, young Arouet crossed his path. The Regent called to him and said: "Monsieur Arouet, I bet that I'll let you see something you've never seen before."—"What's that?" asked the young man.—"The Bastille," replied the Regent.

The next day Philippe d'Orléans wrote to M. de la Vrillière:

"It is the order of His Royal Highness that Sieur Arouet fils be arrested and taken to the Bastille.
This 16th day of May, 1717
PHILIPPE D'ORLEANS."

The same morning, Voltaire's bedroom was filled with police who escorted him to the Bastille, as he himself humorously described it in the poem *La Bastille:*

The advantages of the lodging were praised to him: sunlight never intruded here annoyingly; these ten-foot-thick walls were assurance of a pleasant coolness. He should admire how solidly everything was fastened with threefold doors and triple locks: "This is done for your safety." At twelve o'clock he was given warm egg soup, a dish which did not exactly appeal to him. But he was told: "Eat in peace; here nobody will hurry you."

It was of no avail that he wrote to the Duke de Sully on the same day: "My innocence assures me your protection." He had been arrested and did not know why. It had been the father of his two comrades d'Argenson, the commissioner of police of Paris, who had him arrested, but he was merely carrying out his orders.

The first things Arouet missed (he was fastidiously neat) were his toilet articles, the second, his books, which he was always reading. Only five days after his arrest he asks that the following things be brought to him: two volumes of Homer, in Latin and Greek, two lace-trimmed handkerchiefs, a small cap, two collars, one night-cap and a small bottle of carnation perfume.

There was nothing left for him to do except to

try to pass the time by working. What M. de Caumartin had told him had started him on the idea of a long historic and national poem, whose hero was Henry IV. So it happened that the first half of the work, which at first was entitled *La Ligue*, later *Henriade*, was written in prison. Not only was the place none too inspiring for creative effort in poetry, but aside from that the conditions were difficult: during his eleven months' confinement in the Bastille he was not allowed writing paper. This accounts for the fact that, in the tower called *tour de la Basinière*, he wrote his composition between the lines of a printed book.

Not until April 11, 1718, were the gates of the Bastille opened for him, and as state imprisonment was always followed by exile, he was sent to Châtenay, where his father owned an estate. Hardly freed, he wrote to Minister Maurepas asking him to assure the Regent of his innocence. He said that he was not the author of that detestable inscription, that he had never even laid eyes on it. He never dreamed that his confession to Beauregard was in the hands of his enemies and thought he had been arrested merely on suspicion. At the same time he requested the permission for a few days' leave in Paris, to enable him to give proof of his innocence.

Baron Louis de Breteuil took it upon himself to forward the petition. Young Arouet was granted his request for a few days in Paris: the duration of this stay was extended one month, however, on October 12, 1718, he was declared free to live wherever he pleased.

13

The following lines appear in Voltaire's poem *La Bastille:*

> Me voici donc en ce lieu de détresse
> Embastillé, logé fort à l'étroit,
> Ne dormant point, buvant chaud, mangeant froid,
> Trahi de tous, même de ma maîtresse.

This fragment was written in 1717, in the deepest bitterness.

When he was living on the country estate of the Duke de Sully, he had met a young girl of good family, whose uncle, a prominent man, was hereditary mayor of the town of Sully, and was on terms of intimacy with the family at the château. The girl's full name was Suzanne Cathérine Gravet de Corsembleu de Livry; she was called Mlle. de Livry.

On the second floor of the château there was a private theater and the strikingly beautiful twenty-four-old Suzanne with her swan's neck and her magnificent complexion had an ardent desire to appear on the stage. Young Arouet was the perfect instructor for her, having instructed actors and actresses all his life, and himself played so many rôles. But before long the relations between teacher and pupil developed into something else, something flaming and mutual. The happy lover engaged Largillière to paint his portrait for Suzanne—the famous portrait of the young Voltaire.

The well-known epistle, *Les Vous et les Tu,* describes the further development of this affair, in Paris. The happy pair drove in a hackney-coach and had a frugal supper for two, which by Suzanne's presence became ambrosia. At times they were a trio. Voltaire had an intimate and admired friend, young Lefèvre de la Faluère de Genonville, who was present at the meals of the young pair, shared their amusements and listened to their songs.

While Voltaire was in the Bastille it was very natural that his friend should take his place and presumably the understudy had "gone on" for his principal even on earlier occasions. As it goes in the epistle *Les Vous et les Tu:*

> Contente d'un mauvais souper
> Que tu changeais en ambroisie,
> Tu te livrais, dans ta folie,
> A l'amant heureux et trompé
> Qui t'avait consacré sa vie.

As always when shoved to the back corner of the best-friend-best-girl triangle, Voltaire was anxious not to lose his friend. His thoughts always went through this cycle: first envy, anger, grief, fury; then

forgiveness, reconciliation, fast friendship. In epistle XVII to Genonville he says:

Tu sais combien l'amour m'a fait verser de larmes,
Fripon, tu sais trop bien,
Toi dont l'amoureuse adresse
M'ôta mon unique bien;
Toi dont la délicatesse
Par un sentiment fort humain
Aima mieux ravir ma maîtresse
Que de la tenir de ma main.
Tu me vis sans scrupule en proie de ma tristesse
Mais je t'aimai toujours tout ingrat et vaurien.

Later on he tried, in the spirit of his time, to regard it as an unimportant matter, to look on infidelity as a trifle, since the erotic instinct was nothing more than a trifle itself.

So he says in an epistle to the Duke de Sully:

Je sais que par déloyauté
Le fripon naguère a tate
De la maîtresse tant jolie
Dont j'étais si fort entêté.
Il rit de cette perfidie
Et j'aurais pu m'en courroucer;
Mais je sais qu'il faut se passer
Des bagatelles dans la vie.

Apparently he soon made it up with Suzanne. In the poem to the physician Gervasi he describes how her image appeared to him when he thought himself near death.

Hélas! en descendant sur le sombre rivage
Dans mon cœur expirant je portais son image;
Ses amours, ses vertus, ses graces, ses appas,
Les plaisirs que cent fois j'ai goûtés dans ses bras
A ces derniers moments flattaient encore mon âme.

But still more eagerly he made it up with Genonville, whose early death was a hard blow to him. In his poem to Gervasi he grieves over the fact that the medical art had proved unable to help his dear friend Genonville and keep him alive for his friends. In his poem, *Aux Manes de M. de Genonville,* he even recalls with melancholy joy his simultaneous association with his friend and Suzanne:

Il te souvient du temps, ou l'aimable Egérie
Dans les beaux jours de notre vie
Nous nous aimions tous trois. La raison, la folie,
L'amour, l'enchantement des plus tendres erreurs
Tout réunissait nos trois cœurs,
Que nous étions heureux! même cette indigence,
Triste compagne des beaux jours,
Ne put de notre joie empoisonner le cours.
Jeunes, gais, satisfaits, sans soins, sans prévoyance
Aux douceurs du présent, bornant tous nos désirs,
Quel besoin avions-nous d'une vaine abondance;
Nous possédions bien mieux, nous avions les plaisirs.

Suzanne was not content with having shone on the little private stage of the Duke de Sully; she wanted a career with the Théâtre Français and counted upon Voltaire to give her the entrée there; for at last the stage had admitted him and the rehearsals of his *Œdipe* were under way.

She wished to play Jocasta, and also comedy rôles; but for all her persistence she met with no success. Finally she went with a troup of French actors to England. When the company failed and the poor troupers had to strike out and each make his own living, Suzanne found refuge in London, at a newly opened café owned by a Frenchman. He was a good man who, moved by the well-bred appearance, the beautiful figure and the sad situation of the poor, unprotected girl, pitied her and spoke of her to his guests. This situation Voltaire has portrayed with such warmth in the play that attacks Fréron—*L'Ecossaise,* in which Lindane represents Suzanne.

A rich and prominent Frenchman, the Marquis Charles Frédéric de la Tour du Pin de Gouvernet, saw Suzanne in the café and fell passionately in love with her. It was so serious that he offered to marry her. In her pride the poor girl refused his offer—she would not have it said that marrying her he had made a mesalliance. She refused the presents he tried to give her. All he could get her to accept were a few tickets of the state lottery. So the Marquis allowed a reasonable time to elapse and then gallantly had a false list printed, showing one of Mlle. de Livry's numbers as winner of an immense sum. All her friends, among them Voltaire, learned of this

good news with interest; she herself, in the belief that she had become a wealthy woman, married the Marquis and entered upon a life of splendor and magnificence. The marriage was performed in 1727.

When Voltaire called on her at her home in Paris, he received a snub from the porter at her door; evidently the Marquise no longer knew Monsieur Arouet. The contrast between this reception and the welcome Suzanne always had for him a few years before suggested the idea for that charming epistle in which the formal "vous" of the present replaces the intimate "tu" of the old days. "All the diamonds and pearls that deck her now are not worth one of her kisses of the old days."

From 1721 to 1778 Voltaire and Suzanne never saw one another. Meanwhile she had become a widow, and pious, and fifty-seven years older. When Voltaire returned to Paris at the age of eighty-three his first visit was to his young love, the Marquise de Gouvernet, who, at eighty-four, had no longer any hesitation about receiving him. The meeting filled him with emotion. "Oh, my friends," he said when he came back, "I have just crossed and recrossed the Styx!"

14

The rehearsals of *Œdipe* took their course. The Duchess de Maine and her set regarded this tragedy as a slap at the Regent and the Duchess de Berri; they could hardly wait for the first performance; they licked their chops at the thought of the Duke d'Orléans and his daughter in attendance, writhing like the King and Queen at the play in *Hamlet.*

Hardly out of prison, Voltaire had asked the Regent if he might dedicate the play to him. This was a piece of his foolhardiness. Later he had the impudence to dedicate to the Pope his *Mahomet,* a play of the impostor in the rôle of founder of religion. Now he tried to dedicate to the Regent his *Œdipe,* a play of incest. He had to be content with dedicating it to the Regent's mother, Elisabeth Charlotte.

This dedication is memorable, not for its wording,

which is no more than the conventional flattery of the period, but for its signature: *Madame de votre altesse royale le très humble et très obéissant serviteur Arouet de Voltaire.*

This, in 1718, is the first appearance of the name that was soon to take the place of his own family name altogether, and that was to serve Voltaire for the next sixty years. Jean Louis Balzac discarded the unattractive name of Guez, and Molière got rid of Poquelin. For the same reason Voltaire from now on dropped the Arouet from his signature. He can no longer bear to have it used and (in his letters to Jean Baptiste Rousseau) he gives as his reason for his aversion that he had often been confused with Roy, who was not only a bad poet but an enemy. Nevertheless, he preserves it in his new name Voltaire, which is an anagram of Arouet le jeune. At the time Voltaire was known only as a distinguished graduate of the Jesuit school, a witty young dandy and street-arab, a brilliant poet and no less brilliant social figure, whose saucy tongue and pen had forced the Regent to lock him up for a year in the Bastille. However, it was known that the opponents of the Regent, the old Marshal de Villars and his beautiful wife, and the whole little court in Sceaux expected great things of him.

So on November 18, 1718, the gentlemen and ladies of the court turned out in force for the première of the drama, primed for a little scandal, the ridiculing, perhaps even hissing of the Regent.

But the Regent and the author won over the audience.

A good-natured, benevolent spectator, Philippe d'Orléans sat and listened to the play; being near-sighted he could hear only. His weak eyes increased the resemblance to the blind Œdipus. With more pride than any queen the Duchess de Berri made her entrance—Jocasta in person. She was exuberantly, radiantly beautiful. Young as she was, there seemed something forceful in her magnificence; her pregnancy had progressed considerably. With her suite of thirty ladies-in-waiting, her attendants, and her guard, she filled the larger part of the amphitheater.

She had even had a canopy built above her seat, which was something new in a French theater.

The play could please either faction. Its composition is exemplary. It is filled with attacks on the clergy; but the clergy is allowed to win in the end. In *Œdipe* the priesthood is hostile to the King; and one of them remarks:

> Tremblez, malheureux roi, votre règne est passé.

The criticisms of religion are never put in the mouth of the leading actor, but are always voiced by a character shown in the end to be wrong. A minor character named Araspes utters the warning against belief in miracles; another minor figure, Philoctetes, is suspicious of priests. He speaks like a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, a supporter of the King against the Pope's power. He offers to help his opponent and rival, Œdipus:

> Contre vos ennemis je vous offre mon bras;
> Entre un pontife et vous je ne balance pas.
> Un prêtre, quel qu'il soit, quelque Dieu qui l'inspire,
> Doit prier pour ses rois, et non pas les maudire.

The best known quotation from the play has become a proverb in France:

> Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense,
> Notre crédulité fait toute leur science.

These and similar lines called forth storms of applause. Voltaire must surely have taken the deepest satisfaction in writing them, in using them, though they have nothing to do with the theme or action of the play, to give expression to his hobby.

How little he was moved in his Till Eulenspiegel nature by the performance was shown by the fact that, just for the fun of it, he went on the stage near the end of the play, in the rôle of a trainbearer to the high priest.

The play was written and acted in such a way as to make Œdipus a sympathetic character. It aroused no aversion to him, nor to the man in the royal stall with whom the whole audience was comparing him. Œdipus touched the heart. Where he sinned it was

fate that made him sin. He was a good and harmless sovereign who honestly tried to govern his people for their own greatest good. Dufresne, a very popular young actor, played the part. And the charming Desmares, who was making her farewell performance before the Regent—whom she had loved tenderly and unselfishly—gave a gracious and natural performance of Jocasta. The sad scene between Œdipus and Jocasta made a deep impression on the audience. They broke into tears when those lovely lips moved, and that tragically beautiful voice poured out Jocasta's last words to him:

> Si tant de maux ont de quoi te toucher,
> Si ta main, sans frémir, peut encore m'approcher,
> Aide-moi, soutiens-moi, prends pitié de la reine!

The incest itself could not horrify the spectators regardless of how terribly it was punished in the tragedy.

They had become familiar with Oriental customs through numerous writers. In Europe itself incest was not unusual.

It was common knowledge that the bishop de Tencin had been living in incest with his sister, Madame de Tencin (the mother of d'Alembert), and it was known that Kings of ancient Egypt had done likewise.

Foreigners in Paris followed this example: According to Saint-Simon's assertion the Prince of Montbelliard married his son to his daughter. According to the memoirs of Elisabeth Charlotte, the Duchess von Württemberg's lover was none other than her own son.

The play, then, was enthusiastically received by the majority of spectators. When the author showed himself in the box of the Marshal de Villars, between the Marshal and his pretty wife, the public called in chorus to her: "Why don't you kiss him!" And, in the general enthusiasm, she did.

The Regent, too, got an ovation, supercilious, self-indulgent, and vicious as he was. With his fine intellect and his keen appreciation he had of course missed nothing of the play's contemporary applica-

tion or its allusions to himself. But he never batted an eyelid, didn't in the least feel hurt or embarrassed. He applauded, had the author called to him, and granted him an annual income of twelve hundred livres, roughly equal to twelve hundred dollars today.

A few days later, Voltaire accepted a very pleasant invitation to dine with the Duke. "Monseigneur," he said to his host, "I am highly gratified at having Your Royal Highness provide my meals. But I implore Your Royal Highness not to provide me again with lodging at your expense."

For the first time young Arouet had attracted public attention and had earned a reward deserved by one who refused to be discouraged or tried even by calamity but had kept on indefatigably and with undeniable talent. Later, in a letter dated October 22, 1759, he writes d'Argental: "I am supple as an eel, lively as a lizard and industrious as a squirrel." He was so known since his earliest youth.

Œdipe was an extraordinary success. The play was given forty-five times in succession, which was something hitherto unheard-of. It pleased the reading public as well as the playgoing public. The censor, La Motte, upon whom the publication of the play depended, could not content himself with the dry formula of approval that the censor's report had to give or withhold; and although he had been maliciously attacked in *Le Bourbier,* he described the author in his report as a worthy successor of Corneille and Racine. This angered old Chaulieu and provoked him to write the epigram quoted earlier in this book.

Voltaire, however, did not let the play speak for itself. It came out, as you might say, in seven coats of armor. Besides a regular introduction and dedication, it was introduced by no less than seven letters to M. de Genonville. The first protests that he was not the author of the poem *J'ai vu,* and contains his thanks to the actors; in the following he criticizes Sophocles' *Œdipus* by pointing out the improbability that the King should be so slow to recognize his fate in spite of all hints and signs; after that he considers

Corneille's *Œdipus* and criticizes the dull episode of Theseus' love-affair with Dirce, which as it goes on obscures the interest in the fate of Œdipus; finally he reviews his own tragedy and very frankly draws attention to the improbabilities inherent in the theme, which he has been able to cover up only, not eliminate. He also points out the flaw in the disappearance of Philoctetes after the third act. On the other hand, he stoutly defends the plausibility of a passion aroused again in Jocasta for Philoctetes. He demonstrates the falsity of the common eighteenth century assumption that Jocasta was sixty years old. He shows why she must actually have been about thirty-five, and as he says humorously but no less truly: "Women would be very unhappy if at that age they could no longer arouse any carnal feeling."

Among the men to whom Voltaire sent his tragedy was Jean Baptiste Rousseau, who at that time was in Vienna. Rousseau answered in a pleasant, hearty letter, which overflows with praise and reveals the sincere admiration of the older poet for the younger. Reading this letter one thinks what a pity that, through fault on both sides, this friendly relation should later turn into the most bitter and relentless animosity.

An acquaintance of importance met by Voltaire about this time, was the noted, or perhaps notorious Baron Görtz, the powerful minister of Charles XII. They met at the home of the rich Swiss banker Baron Hoguère, who entertained frequently in Paris, and who must be identical with the Högger mentioned by Fryxell as having loaned money to Charles XII in Turkey. As unbelievable as it sounds, considering the difference in age, Görtz and Voltaire became intimate friends; there is even a story that Görtz wanted to take the bright young man with him to Sweden. Apparently Görtz, with his adventurous blood and with the gift of managing people, which enabled him to have a constant influence on the otherwise intractable Charles XII, had felt in Voltaire something akin to his own nature. It is strange that Voltaire, who had criticized Law so relentlessly, did not see the resemblance between Law and Görtz, a resemblance

which did not stop at the fact that both of them had issued paper money. Just then Görtz was cherishing far-reaching political plans, the aim of which was to put an end to the hostility between Peter the Great and Charles XII by an alliance, plans which affected all Europe, but which were tragically disrupted by the death of Charles. At the end of the same year in which Voltaire and Görtz met in Paris, Charles XII fell in the battle near Frederikshald, and Görtz was taken to Stockholm and beheaded.

There is no doubt but that it was the contact with Görtz that had awakened Voltaire's interest in the Swedish adventurer and hero, and led him to write his *Histoire de Charles Douze.*

15

Precocious as Voltaire was mentally, he had an equally precocious appreciation of the value of money. One simply had to have money to lead the kind of existence without which life did not seem to him worth living. In his early youth, because of the dissatisfaction of his father with his way of living, and because of the unprofitableness of his art, he was compelled to visit money-lenders and usurers, of whom he has left us some humorous descriptions. We marvel at his being summoned, during his stay in Sully, in 1719, because of a promissory note for five hundred francs which he had made at the age of thirteen to a woman named Thomas. He refuses to pay on one ground because he is still a minor, he lacks one month to maturity, i.e., twenty-five years; on another ground because he insists that he has returned the money, and has been assured by the woman that she has burned the note.

In 1719 Voltaire was living in a modest lodging in the rue de la Calandre. He was constantly invited out for lunch and supper; but of course he wanted to lead a life in keeping with his position. The humiliating and dependent status of writers repelled and disgusted him.

In the previous century, writers had lived on the

bounty of a wealthy patron. Corneille had known such poverty that in his old age he owned but one pair of shoes. He dedicated his *Cinna* to the financier Montauron, who paid one hundred gold pieces for the honor, and in that dedication compared him with the Emperor Augustus. La Fontaine had to go from door to door, to Bouillon and Herwart and to Madame de Sablière, to beg for food, lodging, and clothing. Colletet was so poor that as Boileau says, "he sought his bread from kitchen to kitchen." In the eighteenth century Allainval, a dramatist whose plays were frequently performed, was so completely lacking in means that he hadn't a roof over his head. Writers lived like parasites. How pitiful was La Bruyère during his stay at the house of Duke Louis de Bourbon, where he had been first teacher, and then companion, but always in a menial position! We cannot, either, forget how his fellow-servant, the poet Santeuil, died: from a pinch of tobacco which the Duke put in his glass—the droll fellow!

It was well known that Madame de Tencin, a lady who was very affable, and who never intended to humiliate anyone, every New Year gave two yards of velvet for new trousers to each writer who sat at her table. Voltaire heard of it and resolved that he would never come to any such pass. He had business sense and meant to be independent.

Even more than this: He won independence for writers as a class; he acquired also the freedom for authors to say openly all that poverty or gratitude had hindered his predecessors from saying. He separated the two conceptions scribe and parasite which until then had been synonymous.

As related before, the Government of Philippe d'Orléans, in need of money, founded in 1716, a tribunal called the *Chambre de Justice,* modeled after the tribunal of the same name, founded fifty years before. Its purpose was to investigate the origin of the fortunes of financiers, and to determine arbitrarily the taxes. No less than 4,410 wealthy men were alarmed, and the tribunal succeeded in extorting a sum of one hundred and sixty million livres from them. However, no more than seventy million of

this reached the state treasury. The rest went into the pockets of the Regent's court, part into those of the ladies and part into the pockets of those whom he jokingly called his *roués*. When, for instance, the treasurer of the military police, Paparel, was sentenced to death for dishonesty in office and his entire fortune confiscated, the Marquis de la Fare, Paparel's son-in-law, succeeded in having the Regent transfer to him Paparel's immense fortune. The father-in-law was pardoned but had no sou returned to him.

Justice was not always had, even when the *Chambre de Justice* did its best. But of course the fury of the financiers was centered on this tribunal and still more on the informants who provided it with material for indictments. For this reason Voltaire wrote his ode, *La Chambre de Justice,* which brands this tribunal as infamous. It expresses indignation over the demand that families be compelled to give information as to the origin of their fortunes:

Une ordonnance criminelle
Veut qu'en public chacun révele
Les opprobres de sa maison;
Et, pour couronner l'entreprise,
On fait d'un pays de franchise
Une immense et vaste prison.

Furthermore, the ode expresses a justifiable contempt for the informants motivated by selfishness, envy, and spite:

Le délateur, monstre exécrable,
Est orné d'un titre honorable
A la honte de notre nom;
L'esclave fait trembler son maître;
Enfin nous allons voir renaitre
Les temps de Claude et de Néron.

According to gossip of the day, which Maurepas helped to circulate, this ode was written at the request of two financiers, Pâris and Héron. Certainly Pâris later showed gratitude. Indeed it was he and his brothers whom Voltaire had to thank for the greater part of his fortune aside from what he won in a lottery.

At his father's death (on January 1, 1722) Voltaire

did not inherit a great fortune. When he took office, the elder Arouet put up a sum of 240,000 livres as a bond. This did not represent his whole fortune. His daughter, Madame Mignot, received as dowry two houses in Paris. Voltaire's brother Armand, who inherited the father's office, was unable to pay Voltaire his share, i.e., one half of the 240,000 livres, and Voltaire was not satisfied with the interest on his share. This led to differences between the brothers, which continued for years. But Voltaire had a yearly income of 4,250 livres, granted him by the Regent.

From a letter which he wrote in 1718 to Madame de Bernières, the wife of the President of the Parliament, it can be seen that at the age of twenty-four he was engaged in business transactions which at that time were considered natural and justified. Today they would be called rather shady. He writes that his letter had been interrupted by a delegation which proposed to put him at the head of a newly founded company. "I, Madame, prefer your company, which is the most pleasant I know, to the Indian Company in which I have invested a good deal of my fortune. Let me assure you that I am thinking more of the pleasure of visiting you at your country estate than of the business we are going to transact."

He acted as intermediary at the closing of deals or the renewal of leases and found it a profitable occupation. "The Regent has given his word," he writes. "And as the person (apparently a woman) who has received his consent has also given me her word I have no fear of their using some other intermediary. I can even go so far to say that, should these people try to leave me out of it, I have enough influence to put the whole scheme on the rocks. . . . You tell me that if I am not in Paris on Thursday I will be dropped out of the business. You know these gentlemen, so you can just tell them for me that they alone can be the losers, as I was given the concession, and as long as I have it I choose whatever company I please." In the next letter he declares that he has got hold of an even bigger proposition, and that it is a sure thing: "The party (you know the one I

mean) is on the right side of the Regent and he'll get the pick of the business."

A year later he made an amazing killing. Dining one evening at the house of Madame de Dufay, he listened to one of the guests—it was the brilliant libertine Condamine—making fun of the Comptroller General, Lepelletier-Desfort. It seems that the comptroller, in order to pay off the notes issued by the municipality, had instituted a lottery which could be worked for a win by a simple calculation. Voltaire owned some of the tickets, and, astounded by the correctness of the calculations, which he promptly checked, used it and won 500,000 francs. The comptroller, angry over his own shortsightedness, sued him but lost the suit. From that day on, Voltaire had no more worries over money.

16

The Duchess de Villars was so charmed by Voltaire's *Œdipe* that she at once invited the young poet to stay with the Marshal and herself at Villars. He accepted the invitation and—fell passionately in love. He was twenty-five, and she was thirty-four, very beautiful, adored by her circle, and incidentally by her husband, whom this passion for his own wife made somewhat ridiculous in the eyes of his contemporaries. Although his renown as Field Marshal helped him to live it down. The duchess praised and flattered and pampered Voltaire impossibly; but nothing more. She was fire and flame for his art; for him she was simply a good friend. Not that she was without sentiment; there was an Abbé de Vauréal to whom she showed a marked partiality. But for once in his life Voltaire suffered so keenly from a love denied that he lost his zest for work, neglected whatever literary plans he had, and was in a constant feverish fret.

The Marshal showed a sincere liking and a great admiration for his young guest. Again and again he calls him France's first poet. When the young man, in order to get over his passion, retired for a while from

the château, the Marshal wrote him very pleasantly to come back to them. The good man disposes of all of Voltaire's false excuses for not returning, without for a moment suspecting his real reason.

To his friend, the Marquise de Mimeure, Voltaire confided that he was resolved not to go again to Villars; the Marquise seems to have approved of this. But he was easily persuaded to break his resolution again and again.

Only when he realizes that any kind of work becomes for him impossible does he make up his mind firmly to tear himself away. He uses the same trick he uses all his life: he is dying, terribly low, and his physician (this time it is Vinache) strictly forbids any visitors to see him. As a typical example of the style and tone of a great lord and important general of that time, a few extracts from a letter written Voltaire by the Marshal on this occasion are worth looking at. One should take into consideration the fact that the writer is a Duke, and forty-one years older than the young man whom he invites so impressively:

"If you want to take my advice, then don't entrust yourself to the care of Vinache, don't be taken in by his seductive speech, his art of trying to relate the combined influence of the seven planets and minerals to the seven vital organs of the human body.

"Come to us and eat good soup at regular times, don't take more than four meals a day, and go early to bed! Keep away from paper, ink, dice and lansquenet! I permit you to play checkers. Two months of such diet are far better than Vinache.

"I owe you a thousand thanks for the information you have given us. The Marquis (his son) has been grieving over the closing of our theatre and has resolved to return to his regiment. My coach which will bring him to Paris on Saturday will bring you back here on Sunday.

"Now we have opened a theatre of our own. The Marquise (his daughter-in-law) took charge of it with an ardor which is worthy of her, she was the daughter of Marshal de Noailles; she undertook to make up two soldiers from the King's regiment, for the rôles

of Pauline and Stratonice, and although she applied more paint to their faces than there is on a carriage, she found it still was not enough.

"Mlle. Ludière, who is bashfulness personified, was in a bad scrape when she had to wrap crinoline around the naked hips of the two grenadiers because . . .

"What you tell us is more interesting than all the news we can tell you. One of the servant girls has fallen passionately in love with a gardener. Her mother, a worse dragon than Madame Dumay and married a second time, is opposed to the marriage. Madame la Maréchale has interfered in this matter; but she preferred to scold the mother rather than to pay the dowry herself, which is not like her usual generosity. . . .

"Here, my dear poet, you have all I can give you in bad prose in return for your verses. A thousand regards to the Duke and Duchess de Sully, both of whom I wish good health so that you may undertake the journey to us. Right now we have good and numerous company; we are twenty-two at the table, but most of them will depart tomorrow."

As can be seen, this letter was written in the age of politeness.

Voltaire was much sought after. Now he stayed at the castle of Duke de Richelieu, now in Maisons at the home of his friend, the President, or again, in spite of himself, at Villars, where at that time Fontenelle's *La Pluralité des Mondes* was being studied. There was great popular interest in events transpiring on the planets Saturn and Jupiter, which in default of a better instrument, were observed through opera glasses. Voltaire humorously describes this:

Le soir, sur des lits de verdure,
Lits, que de ses mains la nature,
Dans ces jardins délicieux
Forma pour une autre aventure,
Nous bouillons tout l'ordre des cieux:

Nous prenons Venus pour Mercure,
Car vous saurez qu'ici l'on n'a
Pour examiner les planettes,
Au lieu de vos longues lunettes,
Que des lunettes d'opéra.

One of the houses in which the young poet felt at home was that of the Marquis de Mimeure. The Marquis was a member of the French Academy, a fine intellect and a straightforward and agreeable gentleman. His wife formerly a beauty, and even now in her forties quite a handsome figure, had always liked to make her home the center of the literary and artistic life of Paris. Since the year 1714 Voltaire had been received there with open arms. He corresponded with the Marquise as an intimate friend. Nevertheless, it was hard for him to make himself congenial with the different wits to whom the house was open: Roy, whom he abhorred and who hated him, was one. Another was Piron who, like the master of the house, came from Bourgogne and was received with distinction as the merry, witty gipsy he was. At first he behaved very politely toward Voltaire, but, hurt by the latter's harsh attitude, he became his bitter enemy and opponent.

From the time when Voltaire began to feel strongly attracted by the beautiful wife of the President, Madame de Bernières, and especially after she in turn began to show a jealous interest in him, Voltaire lost interest in Madame de Mimeure. Madame Bernières became so unreasonable as to forbid him to visit the poor Marquise who had just had her breast amputated as the result of a grave disease.

Doubtless Madame de Bernières wished to have her young friend on hand as much as possible; she wished him to live at her home, to eat at her table. After 1723 a whole apartment was kept at his disposal in her house. In a letter of January 15, 1722, he writes her that he realizes more and more clearly that "she alone was his true friend." Bernières was President of the Parliament of Normandy, Madame de Bernières, thirty-five years old and very pretty, was rather dictatorial in her behavior, and she carried it off successfully by force of her husband's high rank and very considerable fortune.

Voltaire was as much at home at her country seat Rivière-Bourdet as in her house in Paris. But in order not to sacrifice his independence he paid for every stay. That this was the case was shown several

years later. Desfontaines, among many other nasty libels against Voltaire, charged him with having sponged on the President de Bernières. The latter's wife made it known that Voltaire had paid the sum of 1,800 francs to cover expenses consequent upon his visit.

At the estate of Richelieu Voltaire felt thoroughly comfortable. From there, in 1720, he writes to his friend Thiriot:

"At present I am living in the nicest château in France. No Prince in Europe has such beautiful statues in such great number. Everything here reminds one of the greatness of Cardinal de Richelieu. The town is built like the Place Royal. The Château is immense, but what pleases me most is the Duke de Richelieu, whom I like with inexpressible tenderness —no more, though, than you."

The young Duke had just finished seventeen months in prison for his conspiracy to deliver the city of Bayonne to the Spaniards. The Regent remarked that for what Richelieu had done he deserved to lose four heads if he had that many. However, the Regent's daughter, Mademoiselle de Valois, obtained pardon for him. She loved him madly, and to save his life she accepted the suit of the Duke de Modena whom she had till then refused to marry.

17

One of the country places which young Voltaire not infrequently visited was La Source, the estate of Henry Saint John, Lord Bolingbroke. Voltaire little suspected that what he learned there was an invaluable preparation for the future. There Voltaire met for the first time a young Englishman almost perfectly equipped with the attributes of a great man. For the first time he met a remarkable political and parliamentary genius, and for the first time he came in contact with an English aristocrat who, besides being a thoroughly experienced statesman, was the champion of the most advanced English freethinking of that time, stood out for the highest English culture

of that epoch, and set an example of true political originality.

Bolingbroke's renown as a politician is still fresh: Lord Beaconsfield saw in him his first political ideal. In his early published *Vindication of the English Constitution* Disraeli said of him: "Lord Bolingbroke brought into his party clearness and connection of thought. He had that fiery imagination which, with its incessant fertility, its endless resourcefulness, is just as essential to a great statesman or a great general as to a great poet. He was the ablest writer and the most perfect speaker of his time."

Bolingbroke, sixteen years Voltaire's senior, had a very active life behind him at the time the young poet was introduced to him. After a frivolous youth he was, ever since his election to the House of Commons in 1701, recognized as a splendid orator, as a man of penetrating mind and keen judgment. Although a Tory, he became at the age of twenty-six Minister of War under Marlborough. He held this position for four years only, as the Whigs forced him out.[1]

In the Tory ministry he was appointed Foreign Minister, and it was he who dictated the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht with Louis XIV under such easy conditions that the War of the Spanish Succession ended without humiliation for worn-out France.

In 1714 he had just been given the task of forming the new ministry when the death of Queen Anne forced his resignation. Threatened with a charge of high treason, i.e., communication with the Pretender James Stuart, he fled to France. For seven years after the Pretender's unsuccessful landing in Scotland—from 1716 to 1723—Bolingbroke lived in France until the Duchess of Kendal obtained for him permission to return to England.

After 1719 Bolingbroke bought and lived on an estate in Anjou amidst delightful surroundings. Here he had a house which he never tired of arranging and

[1] When Bolingbroke became Minister of War the courtesans of London said to each other: "Bolingbroke gets 8,000 guineas yearly, and all for us!" (Voltaire, letter of April 24, 1769.)

decorating and to which he gave the name La Source, from a fountain which started in his forest, a fountain which he insists in his letters to Swift is the most brilliant and the clearest in Europe.

Here he lived with his mistress, who soon became his wife, a French lady, widow of a certain Marquis de Villette, a brave naval officer and a cousin of Madame de Maintenon. The Marquise had become a widow at the age of forty-two and it was not until almost ten years later that Bolingbroke met her. But in spite of her age he loved her with a flaming jealous passion, and when the two joined their fates they lived in a constant state of delight.

From a letter of Voltaire to Thiriot, dated January 2, 1722, and written after his first stay at La Source, one can see how deeply impressed he has been by Bolingbroke's family life.

"I must describe to you the enduring enchantment of my visit at La Source in the house of my Lord Bolingbroke and Madame de Villette. I have found in this famous Englishman all the calm of his countrymen and all the politeness of ours. Never have I heard our language spoken more correctly or more forcefully. This man who has kept active all his life at recreation or at public work, has nevertheless found time to study and to retain everything. He knows the history of ancient Egypt as well as that of England. He knows Vergil by heart as well as Milton; he has a taste for English, French and Italian poetry; but he enjoys them in different ways because he knows very well how to appreciate the varying genius of each of these literatures."

Naturally, Voltaire could not resist reading his *Henriade* to this couple.

As his relations with the Regent had become more favorable when the latter had discovered that Voltaire was not the author of various attacks on him, the composer of the *Henriade* entertained the idea of dedicating the poem to the Duke on its completion. In 1718 he wrote the Regent a letter on the matter. When the epic was finished in 1720 and the Regent had in the meantime spoken to Voltaire about literature, had among other things called particular atten-

tion to the great talent of Rabelais whom Voltaire always underrated, the poet asked his friend Thiriot to make a copy of the first nine cantos for the Regent.

Now he had the joy of having the *Henriade* praised in the most glowing terms by Bolingbroke and his wife. He mentions this in his letter to Thiriot:

"After the description I have given of Lord Bolingbroke it may seem immodest on my part to say that Madame de Villette and he are infinitely pleased with my poem. In their enthusiasm they rated it above anything else in French poetry. I know very well, of course, that I must deduct a great deal from this exaggerated praise. But I want to spend three months polishing it until it is worthy of at least a part. I believe that if I further improve this work it will finally achieve a logical form."

It requires a certain understanding of the feeling and method of thought of the early eighteenth century, especially its poetic standards, to comprehend this enthusiasm for a work which today, even in the author's native land, has lost all interest. It is certain that even before its publication it interested the better circles. From La Source Voltaire writes to Madame de Bernières: "Let me know what social success my son (Henry IV) has won, if he has made himself many enemies and if it is generally acknowledged that I am his father."

Even before the *Henriade* was published, legends sprang up about it. It seemed that a really great epic, like the Æneid of old, had almost been burned, but was rescued at the last minute by a friendly hand. As Augustus is supposed to have saved from burning the Roman epic condemned by Vergil, so had President Hérault at Castle Maisons snatched from the flames the manuscript of Voltaire who, angered by the criticism of his audience, had thrown the treasure into the grate. This anecdote has been confirmed from too many sources not to be true. However, the probability that a copy existed can hardly be called negligible.

While Voltaire was developing himself as an epic poet, he suffered—as was perhaps to be expected after

the unusual luck he had with his maiden effort *Œdipe*—a severe check as a playwright. His next tragedy, *Artemire,* was received so unfavorably at its first performance on February 15, 1720, that the irritable author jumped from his theater box onto the stage and started a personal argument with the audience. When it became known who the speaker was the spectators became quiet, as he spoke so adroitly, so warmly and eloquently, that he was rewarded with enthusiastic applause. Unfortunately he had been foolish enough to give an important rôle to Mlle. de Livry in which she greatly displeased. The play itself was weak and was unable to overcome the original poor impression, although it aroused the enthusiasm of Adrienne Lecouvreur, and although she played it with her engaging spirit.

Voltaire realized that it was hopeless to continue his battle on such unfavorable territory. He withdrew the play after its eighth performance, in spite of the wish of the Regent's mother to see it again. He used a few verses from it in his later tragedy, *Marianne,* which is on a similar theme: a woman tortured by the cruel jealousy of a man whom she does not love.

18

About this period there crops up for the first time in Voltaire an ambition which he retained many years but which was never really satisfied, the aspiration to a diplomatic career. Since the majority of Voltaire's biographers have been hostile, they have seized on every unsuccessful ambition to ridicule him and to emphasize his weaknesses. There are only a few historians and essayists who have not criticized his inclination for diplomatic activity. Much of the unruly part of his nature had to be tamed before he could be of use as a diplomat; on the other hand, he had in marked degree many of the qualities that go to the make-up of a successful one: tact, affability, winning personality. I am backed in this opinion by no less an authority than Frederick the Great. In his introduction to the *Henriade* he says: "Such a uni-

versal genius, such an outstanding mentality, such a diligent man as M. de Voltaire could have achieved a dazzling success in almost any line, had he chosen to abandon the field of fine arts in order to devote himself to those activities which are usually called the serious professions, requiring zeal and ambition. However, he preferred to follow the irresistible urge of his genius toward art and science."

In 1721 Voltaire wrote his *Epître au Cardinal Dubois,* which in the style of the time flatters the unworthy minister in a shameless manner even going so far as to call him a greater man than his predecessor, Cardinal de Richelieu. May 28th of the following year he wrote to Dubois offering to go on a secret mission to Vienna, ostensibly to visit Jean Baptiste Rousseau, really to bribe a certain Solomon Levi to betray secrets of the Empire that would be valuable to France. Dubois, not because he was too narrow minded to employ a poet in the diplomatic service—he had sent the dramatist Destouches as Ambassador to England—was not attracted by Voltaire's offer, and the thing never came off. It was not until Dubois was replaced by Cardinal Fleury as Prime Minister and Frederick the Great had succeeded Frederick William on the Prussian throne, that Voltaire was given his chance at diplomacy.

About this time occurred an embarrassing incident, a precursor of similar ones which were to have a marked influence on his life. Dining one day at the home of the Minister of War, Le Blanc, it happened that Voltaire was placed at the same table with Captain Beauregard. He had, of course, found out long ago whose denunciations had sent him to the Bastille. It must have been either his intimate friend d'Argental, or the police-spy masquerading as a gentleman. Voltaire, justly angered, and unschooled in keeping silent, said: "I knew that spies were paid, but I did not know that they were rewarded by the privilege of eating at a Minister's table." After dinner Beauregard asked the Minister's permission to chastise Voltaire. The Minister gave his consent, on the condition that nobody should witness the affair.

Beauregard lay in wait for Voltaire's coach on the Sèvres bridge, pulled him out and caned him.

Voltaire obtained a warrant from the local magistrate, but Beauregard had hastened off, and rejoined his regiment. Voltaire, with a thirst for revenge, brought suit against Beauregard before the Châtelet Tribunal and pursued the case relentlessly. Moreover, he went all the way to the Sologne himself in a vain effort to find his enemy and obtain personal satisfaction. Meanwhile the law case proceeded with the usual aggravating slowness. In a letter to Madame de Bernières, dated January 15, 1723, Voltaire writes that he had hunted the man and had others hunt him, to no avail, but that he was fully determined never to give up the suit. Some months later Le Blanc was dismissed and exiled. He had been found out in certain stock market deals, besides Madame de Prie did not like him. In his place M. de Breteuil became Minister of War. Then at last Voltaire had the satisfaction of seeing Beauregard clapped in prison and kept there for some time.

Had Beauregard been of noble birth he would doubtless have got off scott-free, like the Count de la Feuillade some time before.

The Count resented the satire *Tart â la Crême* in Molière's *Critique de l'École des Femmes.* One day in Versailles, as the poet was bowing to him, the Count seized his head and rubbed it so vehemently against his coat buttons that the poor poet's face swam in blood. However, he did this only after he had asked the King: "Sire, can Your Majesty do without Molière?" And Louis XIV, understanding perfectly, returned the rather unkingly answer: "La Feuillade, I beg your indulgence for Molière."

19

His grace and intellect, his insouciant elegance, his readiness with a witty retort, and that presence of mind which was never at a loss for a sharp word or a neat bit of flattery, made young Voltaire a charming companion. But over and above these qualities, it

was that inner sparkle, that gushing spring of fresh ideas lending such a sure spontaneity to his own prose, and influencing the prose of his contemporaries, that made him irresistible.

Women were just as susceptible to this as men and, although Voltaire gave up all eroticism at a comparatively early age, for a long time he stayed young enough to make conquests among the fair sex, as was the fashion in this century of gallantry, not through the heart but through the mind.

A famous auburn beauty, the Countess Marie Marguerite Elizabeth de Rupelmonde, proposed to Voltaire that they go together on a journey to the Netherlands. He did not decline. So far he had seen no part of the world but France. Besides, he had something very definite to do in the Netherlands. Didn't Jean Baptiste Rousseau, his elder brother poet, live in Brussels? They had exchanged polite letters of praise for years and Voltaire wished to meet him. However, he and his seductive companion made no special haste to reach this goal.

The Countess Rupelmonde, if we believe her admirers, was as beautiful as Aphrodite, and if we believe her detractors, was as without regard for virtue. She was the daughter of Marshal d'Aligre and, in 1705, had been married to Maximilian de Récourt, Count de Rupelmonde, who was killed near Villa Viciosa in 1710. Friends and adorers of this famous lady found in her a strong inclination to tenderness and great doubts on the serious questions of life. At the time the two set out on their journey, in 1722, Voltaire was twenty-eight, she thirty-seven, which is an age at which a woman ravishes the adolescent.

The travelers made their first stop at Cambrai. A Peace Congress had just begun, one of those affairs where half the time is spent in getting through ceremonies and the other half without getting anywhere. In a letter to Cardinal Dubois from Cambrai, Voltaire writes that it looks as though all the deputies and cooks in Europe were met. The German delegates did nothing but drink their Kaiser's health. Of the Spaniards, one heard mass twice a day and the other directed a company of actors. The English sent many

swift couriers to Champagne, but few to London. Voltaire asserts that he is writing this letter to His Eminence at the special request of a beauty, and he does not forget to mention who the beauty is. His tone with the Cardinal is surprisingly familiar and easy.

Fête followed fête in Cambrai, and the diplomats vied with one another to pay the most flattering honors to the visiting pair from Paris. Hardly had the marriage of the Infante Don Carlos to the Princess de Beaujolais become known, when the Count de Saint-Estevan arranged a banquet with a ball and public fireworks, and opened two fountains of wine for the populace. Whereupon Count von Windischgrätz honored his Emperor in a manner not to be outdone in splendor and magnificence. And everywhere the two travelers from Paris were guests of honor. At a dinner a unanimous wish was expressed in the poet's presence to see *Œdipe* the next day. But as the program had been arranged for Racine's comedy *Les Plaideurs*, at the special request of Windischgrätz, Voltaire addressed a petition to His Excellency in Madame de Rupelmonde's name:

Seigneur, le congrès vous supplie
D'ordonner tout présentement,
Qu'on nous donne tragédie
Demain pour divertissement.
Nous vous le demandons au nom de Rupelmonde etc.

He delivered the petition in person, was promptly granted it, and informed his irresistible companion with the following lines:

L'amour vous fit, aimable Rupelmonde,
Pour décider de nos plaisirs.
Je n'en sais pas de plus parfait au monde
Que de répondre à vos désirs.
Sitôt que vous parlez, on n'a pas de réplique;
Vous aurez donc *Oedipe*, et même sa critique.
L'ordre est donné pour qu'en votre faveur
Demain l'on joue et la pièce et l'auteur.

The play should be played and likewise a joke on the author: that is, a travesty on *Œdipe* should be presented: Dominique's *Œdipe travesti.*

A letter of Voltaire to Thiriot reveals that he was by no means constant to the fair Rupelmonde. A poem, *Les deux Amours* (*A Madame la marquise de Rupelmonde*) was written to declare before the world that his love for her is pure and therefore steadily grows. This poem must be taken with a grain of salt, like so many of the rhymed gallantries of that age, at which Voltaire had no peer. Another little poem of this journey, addressed to the Comtesse, has been preserved, which shows some real feeling in spite of the style of the time. It begins with a passage in which Apollo and the Sea God succeeded so well in disguising themselves as human beings that nobody recognized them, while Venus, disguised as the lady whom we know, was lamentably unsuccessful.

Mais c'est en vain qu'abandonnant les cieux
Venus comme eux veut se cacher au monde;
On la connaît au pouvoir de ses yeux
Dès que l'on voit paraître Rupelmonde.

All these, however, are trifles. The only thing of lasting value among the poems written during this journey is the *Epître à Uranie*. In Holland she had told him about her religious doubts and her intellectual helplessness. Since he could not openly develop his thoughts in verse without laying himself open to danger, he wrote, like Pierre Bayle before him, both sides of the argument at once. Hence the title *Le Pour et le Contre*. There is no question which of the views the poet prefers, and here we have expressed for the first time in concise verse, Voltaire's early philosophy of life.

For ten years he let the poem lie unprinted. Then it appeared anonymously. It was not until full fifty years later, in 1772, that he dared to give it a place in his works. It begins with the explanation that she had demanded an answer from him, as if he were a second Lucretius:

Tu veux donc, belle Uranie,
Qu'érigé par ton ordre en Lucrèce nouveau,
Devant toi, d'une main hardie,
Aux superstitions j'arrache le bandeau;
Que j'expose à tes yeux le dangereux tableau

Des mensonges sacrés, dont la terre est remplie,
Et que ma philosophie
T'apprenne à mépriser les horreurs du tombeau
Et les terreurs de l'autre vie.

Next he sketches briefly and clearly the contradictions and absurdities of the biblical tradition, its God who makes people sin in order to have the right of punishing them, who gives man the capacity for pleasure and then damns him to eternal torment for using it. This God creates man in His Own Image, and rues it instantly. Blind in His benefactions and blind in His wrath He has no sooner created man than He wishes to destroy him with the Flood. Then, after drowning the fathers, he wishes to die for the children:

Je veux aimer mon Dieu, je cherche en lui mon père:
On me montre un tyran que nous devons haïr.
Il créa des humains à lui-même semblables
Afin de les mieux avilir.
Il nous donna des cœurs coupables
Pour avoir droit de nous punir;
Il nous fit aimer le plaisir,
Pour nous mieux tourmenter par des maux effroyables
Qu'un miracle éternel empêche de finir.
Il venait de créer un homme à son image,
On l'en voit soudain repentir,
Comme si l'ouvrier n'avait pas du sentir
Les défauts de son propre ouvrage.
Aveugle en ses bienfaits, aveugle en son courroux
A peine il nous fit naître, il va nous perdre tous.
Il ordonne à la mer de submerger le monde.

. . . . . .

Va-t-il dans le chaos plonger les éléments?
Ecoutez, ô prodige! ô tendresse! ô mystères!

Il venait de noyer les pères,
Il va mourir pour les enfants.

For the first time, Voltaire also mentions the Christian tradition. It strikes him as the height of absurdity that God's son, God Himself, let Himself be born in a superstitious and ignorant little nation, the conquered and despised dependency of other nations.

Le fils de Dieu même, oubliant sa puissance
Se fait concitoyen de ce peuple odieux;

Dans les flancs d'une Juive il vient prendre naissance
Il rampe sous sa mère, il souffre sous ses yeux
Les infirmités de l'enfance . . .

Then the poet tells the story of Jesus' life and crucifixion according to the Gospels, and calls special attention to the fact that even the death of the Redeemer is insufficient to appease God's anger:

Quoi! Dieu voulut mourir pour le salut de tous,
Et son trépas est inutile!
Quoi! l'on me vantera sa clémence facile,
Quand remontant au ciel il reprend son courroux.

He dwells with particular emphasis on the absurdity of the so-called Original Sin and of the notion that peoples who have never even heard of Christianity should be punished as non-Christians:

Ayant versé son sang pour expier nos crimes,
Il nous punit de ceux que nous n'avons pas faits.
Ce Dieu poursuit encore, aveugle en sa colère
Sur ses derniers enfants l'erreur d'un premier père.
Il en demande compte à cent peuples divers
Assis dans la nuit du mensonge;
Il punit aux fonds des enfers
L'ignorance invincible où lui-même il les plonge,
Lui qui veut éclairer et sauver l'univers.

20

It was with similar ideas that he had written the poem at which he worked so long—it was then called *La Ligue*—later it was entitled *Henriade*—a weak contribution to literature, but a great deed for all time to come. How recently the most liberal minds of Louis XIV's reign had approved, or at least excused, the celebration of Eve St. Bartholomew! How few years since the gentlest of men, like Fénélon, the best-hearted, like La Fontaine, the cleverest, like La Bruyère, even women like Madame de Sévigné, had countenanced the banishment of the Huguenots from France, had even applauded it! Bossuet rejoiced when the promise of tolerance was repealed: "Let us hail this the most glorious event of our lives! Let

our hearts overflow at Louis' piety and let our joy ring to heaven!"

The *Henriade* is today looked on as a very minor poetic effort; but in Voltaire's time it was considered positively breath-taking. Frederick the Great said in the preface that the passage describing the dream of Henry IV was worth more than the whole of the *Iliad*. In this poem Voltaire probed, with a keenness unsuspected at the time, the vital problems of humanity. He exposed the folly and horror of the religious wars. Frederick's critical faculties were carried away by his enthusiasm. The "fire of imagination" that he speaks of is conspicuous by its absence according to modern critics. But Frederick is sound in this, he points out the incalculable service Voltaire rendered man in showing the folly of his forefathers so clearly as to make an eloquent warning against its repetition.

While Voltaire polished and corrected this composition, religious mania for blood still had a hold on Europe. During the year 1721, in a single little Spanish town (Granada), nine men and eleven women were burned alive. There was a big scaffold on which four stakes could burn human flesh at the same time. Two years later, just after the *Henriade* had been completed, Philip V celebrated the arrival in Madrid of the little French Princess, his bride, by the burning alive of nine human beings, so that the Princess might enjoy their cries and the smell of their burning flesh. We need not admire the *Henriade* today, but when we consider that it was to put out these pyres that it was written, we cannot but admire its author.

Up to that time, if there were any pity felt, it was not for the heretic but for the supposedly offended Host. During the dragonades, when Louis XIV's cavalry were billeted on Protestants to torture them and ravish their women, it was done out of pity for the poor Host, which suffered intensely when the damned Huguenots devoured it. In the *Henriade,* which is really a poem of the Eve of Saint Bartholomew, it is man who becomes the object of pity.

The poem, to be sure, was first inspired by an ad-

miration for Henry IV, awakened in Voltaire's mind by Caumartin. The deeper inspiration of the *Henriade,* however was the indignation felt at the imbecile cruelty of the religious views, and fury at the senseless lust for blood, on the part of the people. He did not know that the day of the epic poem had passed, that the form had become lifeless.

Homer, in Voltaire's eyes, was vivid but childish, Vergil a master of composition—in which, therefore, he must be slavishly imitated—and an elegant stylist. He thought the *Æneid,* however, suffered from the fact that the hero was saccharine and uninteresting besides being unhistoric. He, Voltaire, was not childish—this was his least fault—and he had a great, sympathetic hero, a mighty King, a figure of unquestionable historical importance.

He did not know that anecdotal, rhymed history was far from being the same thing as narrative poetry; moreover, with all his lack of naïveté he confused gallantry with love, and allegory with lofty poetic style.

He discovered a hero who had been completely forgotten, who had been put in the shade by the dull, pompous Louis XIV, forgotten as the original Protestant, forgotten as the enemy of Spain, now France's ally by marriage, forgotten, finally, as the great lover, *le vert galant.* One whose virtues and whose faults even made him a more suitable French national hero than Louis. Even if the *Henriade* is no longer read today, it made Henry IV the Hero of France for all time.

Today the work is deservedly forgotten, loaded down as it is with rhetoric and declamation, with abominable allegories, with imitations of Vergilian models, which have a cold, false effect. The wonders that appear in it are boring, as when the besieged see Henry in the clouds on a triumphal chariot of victory. The belief in God, which pervades the work, has an irritating effect by its senseless irrationality, as in the description of the murder of Henry III:

> La mort impatiente attendait sa victime,
> Et pour perdre Valois Dieu permettait un crime.

Or in the tenth canto at Aumale's death in a duel, which is explained by the fact that he did not believe in God:

J'attends tout de mon bras,
C'est de nous que depend le destin des combats.

By today's standard it is almost comic when St. Louis appears to Henry and, in a bad imitation of the sixth book of the *Æneid*, shows him Hell on the gates of which dull allegories stretch their tired limbs. Envy, Haughtiness, Weakness, Ambition, Hypocrisy, each has its own peculiar attributes which are picturesque, indeed, but never give form to the figures. On the whole it seems too bad that Voltaire, with the complete approbation of his contemporaries, should have accomplished with this work the one thing that is not in the least like him and which was furthest from his aim: to be utterly, profoundly boring.

With poor rationalism St. Louis explains to the hero of the poem how God's paternal heart forbids him to make the Punishment of Hell endless:

Ne crois point, dit Louis, que ces tristes victimes
Souffrent des chatiments qui surpassent leur crimes!

God makes use of Infinity when he rewards, but not when he takes revenge:

Sur la terre on le peint l'exemple des tyrans;
Mais ici c'est un père qui punit ses enfants.

Henry, who surely had a crying need of divine indulgence on one score, is really quite absurd when he is reminded by St. Louis that God does not punish minor amusements so terribly:

Il adoucit les traits de sa main vengeresse;
Il ne sait point punir des moments de faiblesse
Des plaisirs passagers, pleins de trouble et d'ennui,
Par des tourments affreux, éternels comme lui.

Two hundred years ago such a consolation was both original and welcome.

A still more difficult task for Voltaire than the explanation of Hell to the rational believer, was to fur-

nish a satisfactory definition of Salvation. Of the dwellers in heavenly abode, however, he says very nicely:

Ils désirent sans cesse, et sans cesse ils jouissent,
Et goûtent dans les feux d'une éternelle ardeur
Des plaisirs sans regrets, du repos sans langueur.

Given a place here with other heroes and heroines is a woman, whose reputation Voltaire later represents as hardly so well-deserved, but who is mentioned with all honor in the *Henriade* and later in his *Essai sur les mœurs.* Jeanne d'Arc is represented as the support of the French throne and as one whose death brings shame upon the English:

et vous, brave Amazone,
La honte des Anglais et le soutien du trône!

There are eloquent and able passages in the *Henriade,* as, for instance, the description of St. Bartholomew's Eve in the second canto.

At some portions of the poem the reader will be surprised and pleased. The passage in which St. Louis describes the firmament (into which, apparently at the last revision of the work, the poet has injected Newton's doctrine of the attraction of celestial bodies) is executed with exemplary simplicity and clearness. Of the sun he says:

De lui partent sans fin des torrens de lumière;
Il donne en se montrant la vie à la matière,
Et dispense les jours, les saisons et les ans
A des mondes divers, autour de lui flottant,
Ces astres asservis à la loi qui les presse
S'attirent dans leur course et s'évitent sans cesse,
Et servant l'un à l'autre de règle et d'appui,
Se prêtent les clartés qu'ils reçoivent de lui.

Next to a eulogy on the English Parliament, one comes upon the following amusing mockery of the States-General at Blois, whom Voltaire uses to symbolize idle parliamentary discussion:

De mille députés l'éloquence stérile
Y fit de nos abus un détail inutile;
Car de tant de conseils l'effet le plus commun
Est de voir tous nos maux sans en soulager un.

The composition, however, is handicapped by the academic-classical style; a superfluity of high-sounding expressions kills all vividness and force. The description of Henry does not contain one significant and memorable feature; there is not one quality in his friend Mornay that would not apply well to the confidant of any tragic hero of that time. The figures of speech lose by borrowing from classical mythology, as, when Henry's charge of the enemy is compared to a landslide, or the valley into which he breaks is personified by its nymphs.

There are no natural surroundings, there is no scene, there is no blade of grass mentioned in the work. As I once put it: "There is no fodder for the horses." The winds are zephyrs, the peasants are shepherds. Voltaire's circumlocution to avoid the use of the word dog is almost burlesque:

> Tels au fond des forêts précipitant leur pas,
> Les animaux hardis, nourris pour les combats,
> Fiers esclaves de l'homme et nés pour le carnage,
> Pressent un sanglier, en raniment la rage,
> Ignorant le danger, aveugles, furieux,
> Le cor excite au loin leur instinct belliqueux.

Far ahead of his times as Voltaire was in other respects, in this he is on the level with his contemporaries, thoroughly dominated by the false ideal of classicism, and by that idol, "good taste," which is even more sacred to that age than the great God of Deism, the Shadow-God whom he had retained.

Voltaire guards and protects this God, useful now as a bugaboo against the dangerous instinct of the crowd, now to furnish a Creator for an imagination incapable of conceiving the creation of the world without a personal omnipotent Creator. However, he always does him homage with striking coldness.

Good taste, on the other hand, he worships with real enthusiasm. That taste was developed out of the finest efforts of the time of Louis XIII and the Augustinian age of Louis XIV. It requires the highest refinement of civilization and at the same time true intelligence.

The classic ideal itself was vague: inevitably so, derived as it was from five centuries of Greek and

Roman writers. The eighteenth century disregarded the originality, the keen sense of reality prevalent in the Greek epic and in Greek dramatic literature. The use of everyday material was considered vulgar, simplicity was childish, and mysticism was evidence of barbaric superstition, regardless of its artistic value.

That ardent feeling cannot be conveyed in a stilted tone, that a sensitive reaction to the sufferings and the absurdities of life cannot be forced out of its natural expression, was something beyond eighteenth-century comprehension. The nobility of expression found in the Greek poets had grown naturally out of the nobility of the thought it expressed, and alongside of the grand style one is apt to find coarseness and buffoonery. But in Voltaire's day dignity and loftiness were the qualities to be striven for, at all costs. Hence all the tedious abstractions and circumlocutions. In ancient times harmony and clearness were possible because people felt harmoniously and thought clearly. The ancient poets were not shy of the mysterious. It forbade transparency, but not clearness. Furthermore, they never hesitated to mix the ceremonial with common impudence, or lyric heights with comic caricature in the same work, be it epic, tragic or comic. In Voltaire's eyes, on the other hand, good taste decreed the absolute separation of the various types and methods of expression; their mixture by the ancients struck him as shocking and ridiculous. And as for clearness, he strove for it so energetically, even devoutly, that he involuntarily sought to simplify things that were really complex and to give superficial explanations for things that were fundamentally inexplicable. One of his firmest beliefs was that there was a basic rule and formula governing all good art.

As we know, Frederick the Great found in the *Henriade* "fiery imagination." We see in it today only an eloquence coming from intelligence or, where the foundation is a little deeper, from reason. As a matter of fact, in the eighteenth century it was reason, thanks to Voltaire's influence, which had to take the place of everything else and which, according to the fundamental conception of the time, acted as talent,

genius, virtue, intellect and taste. Toward the end of the century Marie Joseph Chénier expressed this strikingly:

C'est le bon sens, la raison, qui fait tout;
Vertu, génie, esprit, talent et goût,
Qu'est-ce vertu? raison mise en pratique;
Talent? raison produit avec éclat;
Esprit? raison qui finement s'exprime.
Le goût n'est rien qu'un bon sens delicat;
Et le génie est la raison sublime.

These lines voice the psychology and ethics of Voltaire's century, and its conception of poetry.

21

In Cambrai Voltaire felt, as he wrote to Thiriot, happier than he had ever been in Paris. If this should continue, he would surely forsake his native town, unless perhaps Thiriot should vow to love him forever. This passage is one of the politenesses with which the extravagant flatterer is always rather liberal. It is certain, however, that he found his hospitable reception very pleasant. However, he went on to Brussels, largely because he was anxious to meet Jean Baptiste Rousseau.

At fifty-one this exiled poet was bored with his exile. A marvelously complex genius, he had an unusual technical gift for verse, a rare ability to find the right expression. Yet he was, by inclination, a malicious satirist, who found it impossible to refrain from forming his taunts and jibes into mocking, cleverly rhymed persiflage. No one was immune to his poisonous sting. No consideration of gratitude or friendship could stop him.

He offers an even sharper contrast: as a writer of odes he became more and more pious and fervent. As an epigrammatist he wrote some of the most offensive verses in the French language, and nearly all of these indecent epigrams are directed against the Church, especially against monks and nuns.

After the appearance of several of his early plays

and poems Jean Baptiste found various protectors, such as Baron de Breteuil, the father of Madame du Châtelet, and M. de Francine, director of the opera. This did not keep him from falling out with both of them at the first opportunity.

He was a regular patron of a café situated on the corner of the rue Dauphine and the rue Christine in Paris, the hostess of which was a widow by the name of Laurent. Here, literary men, painters, musicians, poets and thinkers used to meet. The writers did not fail to read their verses to each other. They were criticized and more than occasionally scoffed at, which naturally enough frequently caused anger. This café was thus the source of many amusing ballads and biting epigrams.

Apparently there was a very poor spirit of *camaraderie* in this group of wits. This is often the case with people of related talents. And it was very hard for Rousseau to restrain his venom. It was a horrible clique in which pretended friends backbit anyone guilty of success.

To a sneering couplet from Rousseau, the poet Danchet replied with an epigram whose first four lines are not without barbs:

Fils ingrat, cœur perfide,
Esprit infecté,
Ennemi timide,
Ami redouté.

Voltaire, in his *Vie de J. B. Rousseau* (1738), asserts that Rousseau wrote no less than seventy-two epigrams on the habitués of this café. Of course, the number means nothing, but surely the unrestrained, satirical, malicious habit of thought means a great deal.

Just at this time (1701) Rousseau found a new and influential protector in the Duke de Noailles, and had the satisfaction of seeing his play *La Ceinture Magique* presented for the Duchess de Bourgogne, with many prominent men, even royal princes, filling the cast.

But it was his odes rather than his plays that brought him fame. His success in this field did not

come easily nor at once. He entered a contest with Antoine de la Motte-Houdart, the author of the then admired tragedy *Inès de Castro,* when, in the year 1707, the French Academy offered a prize for the best ode on *The Glory of the King.* La Motte was given all the votes.

Rousseau answered with his usual weapons. He wrote verses on the Abbé Bignon, although he had secured Rousseau his place in *l'Academie des inscriptions et belles lettres,* and even on the Duke de Noailles, because on the strength of the Duke's influence he had expected an election to the Académie Française, but La Motte was accepted, while Rousseau was not considered.

Beside himself with resentment, Rousseau wrote an extraordinarily sneering poem against La Motte and all his friends who frequented the café. In it he attacked the Captain of the Guard, La Faye (who got physical revenge) as well as Boindu, the Abbé de Bragelongue, Crébillon, and finally a man of exceptionally coarse nature, the mathematician, Joseph Saurin, who in his youth had been a Calvinist in Lausanne and had become a Catholic in France. Saurin was an energetic, plain-spoken man. He had a habit of telling people to their faces exactly what he thought of them, and therefore did not have many friends.

Saurin was the one who caused Rousseau's banishment from the café. In order to get revenge, the poet concocted the strange scheme of accusing Saurin of being the author of the offensive poem which libeled his friends and himself.

Rousseau's scheme was not so foolish as it seemed: he argued that in searching among the papers of a man like Saurin, who had changed his religion, the authorities would find, not the poem, but probably enough incriminating evidence of other kinds to send him to prison for a considerable time.

Rousseau, therefore, bribed a wretched cobbler's apprentice to testify that Saurin had secretly requested him to let his libellous poem get in the hands of those it attacked. He himself fell prostrate before the wife of the Minister of War, Madame de

Voisin, and begged her protection against the slanderer, Saurin. She wrote on the same day to Le Comte, Chief Justice of the Criminal Court, and Saurin was arrested at once (September, 1710).

Although the victim of this trick had few personal friends, he now suddenly got all of Rousseau's enemies on his side. And their number certainly was large. Fontenelle, who had been insulted by Rousseau, appeared in prison and offered Saurin his purse. Everyone came to his assistance and presented petitions for him. All that had to be considered was the rank absurdity of the accusation that Saurin was the author of a pamphlet which abused Saurin. After two months he was released and given permission to bring action against Rousseau at criminal law.

For Rousseau there was nothing left but to flee. The sentence of the Parliament decreed exile for life, because he "had composed and disseminated foul and libellous verses, and thereafter had employed fradulent means to obtain evidence for the false accusation against Saurin."

First he went to Switzerland, where Count de Luc took care of him, until he offended his son and had to leave the house. Then he went to Vienna and there Prince Eugene cared for him. From Vienna he had moved on to Brussels hoping that the Marquis de Prie, who was Commander in the Netherlands, would give him some sort of position. Lord Cadogan, who was then in The Hague took him to England and got subscribers for his works. But after his return to Brussels he forfeited the favor of his protector. In his unfortunate bent for satire he helped Count de Bonneval compose a libellous poem against Prince Eugene, and thereby lost the pension which the Prince had granted him.

These were the qualities of the man whom Voltaire was so anxious to meet: undoubtedly a talented lyricist and maliciously witty satirist, but by no means a perfect gentleman or an agreeable companion. As Voltaire himself was a rather exacting person, with a similar inclination to ruthless satire, it cannot be

surprising, that the harmony between the older and the younger poets was not long-lived.

At the beginning all went well. Even the fact that the first Rousseau heard about Voltaire concerned a disturbance the young man created in church during Mass, did not influence him unfavorably. We have a letter Rousseau wrote to a friend (September 22, 1722), in which he speaks very warmly of his fellow-poet:

"Monsieur de Voltaire has spent eleven days here, during which we have scarcely been apart. I was delighted to meet a young man who justifies such high hopes. He was so kind as to entrust to me his poem (the *Henriade*) for five or six days. I can assure you it does its author high honor. Our nation needs a work like this: the economy is admirable, and the verses are perfect except for a few weak places, the faults of which, however, he admitted to me. I have not found anything in it which can justly be criticized."

It was Voltaire's intention to have the *Henriade* printed in The Hague; he had ample grounds for fearing that its publication would be forbidden in France, and when he arrived at The Hague he took preliminary steps. At that time Holland was regarded as a refuge of literature, an asylum for free thought.

He liked The Hague exceedingly, especially when the sun shone. Holland won his heart at first sight. He enjoyed its fields and meadows, its green trees and canals, which constitute an earthly paradise extending from The Hague to Amsterdam. Amsterdam, then Europe's treasure-house, inspired him with great respect. A thousand ships were in the harbor, and among the five hundred thousand inhabitants he came across not one idler, not one fop, not one pauper, not one snob. Like Holberg, he admired the spirit of the people. He saw the Prime Minister of the Republic go on foot, unescorted by lackeys, in the midst of the crowd. In Holland nobody thought of stopping what he was doing to watch the Prince pass. On every hand Voltaire encountered simplicity and industry. He had another new experience: he.

who all through life never ceased bemoaning his poor health, felt strong and fit in Holland.

The next meeting with Rousseau turned their friendship into bitter, rankling hostility, that lasted as long as they both lived. They were both so irritable that a trifle could sever the friendship, and both so belligerent and vengeful that each tried to outdo the other in vituperation. From the moment of their falling out they never tired of hurling the foulest and most abusive sneers.

To give an idea of Rousseau's aggressiveness, the following verses from his pen, directed against Voltaire, may be cited:

Petit rimeur antichrétien,
On reconnaît dans tes ouvrages
Ton caractère et non le mien,
Ma principale faute, hélas je m'en souviens,
Vint d'un cœur qui, séduit par tes patelinages
Crut trouver un ami dans un parfait vaurien,
Charme des fous, horreur des sages . . .
Mais je ne me reproche rien
Que d'avoir sali quelques pages
D'un nom aussi vil que le tien.

It is incredible how often in his works Rousseau went out of his way to abuse Voltaire, parry his attacks, belittle his poetry, and expose him to ridicule and contempt.

As early as 1731 Voltaire expressed his scorn of Rousseau in his *Le Temple du Gôut*. And his scorn becomes more and more withering.

Take, for instance, the vitriolic poem *La Crepinade* (1736); or read in the first edition of the *Ode on Ingratitude* to the Duke de Richelieu (also 1736) the verses on Rousseau:

Dis nous, Rousseau, quel premier crime
Entraîna tes pas dans l'abîme
Où j'ai vu Saurin te plonger?
Ah, ce fut l'oubli des services;
Tu fus ingrat, et tous les vices
Vinrent en foule t'assiéger.

One should look up the attacks on Rousseau: in *Mémoire du Sieur de Voltaire* (1739), in *Mémoire sur la Satire* (same year), the detailed *Life of Rousseau,*

the *Epistle of Defamation* (to Madame du Châtelet, 1735), which begins:

> Ce vieux rimeur; couvert d'ignominies,
> Organe impur de tant de calomnies;

where Rousseau, as in the fifty-fourth rhymed letter on Newton's philosophy, is told over and over that he has red hair; the essay *Sur le Sieur Rousseau* (1736); and the epigram of January, 1736; which makes the point that if Rousseau is still alive, it is only his desire to defame that keeps him so:

> S'il est vrai qu'encore il respire,
> Car il est mort quant à l'esprit;
> S'il est vrai que Rousseau vit,
> C'est de seul plaisir de médire;

and two more epigrams, 118 and 120, both of which are embittered and scornful; the first is the better:

> Rousseau, sujet au camouflet,
> Fut autrefois chassé, dit on,
> Du théâtre à coups de sifflet,
> De Paris à coups de bâton;
> Chez les Germains chacun sait comme
> Il s'est garanti du fagot;
> Il a fait enfin de dévot,
> Ne pouvant faire l'honnête homme.

As far as can be seen—neither gives any full account of the first quarrel—the original cause of hostility was so trivial that only literati could have made it the ground for such a lasting hatred.

Rousseau had read Voltaire his *Jugement de Pluton*, a vigorous satire on the Parliament of Paris, which had sentenced him. Voltaire, who found the satire too rude and brutal, said: "Master, that was no work of our great and good Rousseau." Thereupon they went for a drive around the town, at which Voltaire jocularly said: "Now get even with me! Now take revenge!" And he read him the letter to Madame de Rupelmonde. Rousseau, who had been converted while in exile and formally belonged to the pious, maintains that his anger was so aroused by the terrible insults to religion, even to the Saviour Himself, that he interrupted the reader with the words: "I

don't understand how you can read such contemptible lines to me." Nevertheless, both poets visited the theater together. After the theater they talked about Rousseau's *Ode to Posterity,* which the latter had read to Voltaire, and, when they parted, Voltaire closed that evening's discussion with: "You know, master, that is an ode that will never reach its address." After that, the two seem never to have spoken to each other.

This *Ode à la Postérité* deserves our attention. It gives us a good idea of Jean Baptiste's style when he had flights of fancy. The first stanza reads:

Déesse des Héros qu'adorent en idée
Tant d'illustres Amans dont l'ardeur hazardée
Ne consacre qu'a Toi ses vœux et ses efforts;
Toi, qu'ils ne verront point, que nul n'a jamais vue
Et dont pour les Vivans la faveur suspendue
Ne s'accorde qu'aux Morts.

The poet makes a bid for posterity's admiration, by calling attention to all he had to overcome during his life. A few stanzas will give a sufficient idea of the lyric style employed before Voltaire's time:

Le Ciel, qui me créa sous le plus dur auspice
Me donna pour tout bien l'amour de la justice,
Un génie ennemi de tout art suborneur,
Une pauvreté fière, une mâle franchise,
Instruite à détester toute fortune acquise
Au dépens de l'honneur.

It is enlightening to find that Rousseau dared boast of his strict sense of honor and of his masculine frankness. He furthermore explains how his many virtues have won him the wicked envy of scores:

C'est cet amour du vrai, ce zèle antipathique
Contre tout faux brillant, tout éclat sophistique
Où l'orgueil frauduleux va chercher ses atours.
Qui lui seule suscita cette foule perverse
D'ennemis forcenés, dont la rage traverse
Le repos de mes jours.

It is regrettable that Voltaire was so cruel and petty that it was impossible for him to leave Rousseau alone. In 1738 he is still able to write the lengthy *Life of Jean Baptiste Rousseau,* the authorship of

which he tries to conceal. He dwells again and again on the fact that Rousseau's father had been a shoemaker, and he accuses the son of being ashamed of and disowning his father. He charges him—perhaps in good faith—with the authorship of the *Moïsiade,* which actually had been written by Lourdet. With rankling hatred he enumerates every libellous poem, in order to humiliate Rousseau, regardless of the fact that the latter, at the beginning of the year, had suffered a stroke which robbed him of his reason and of the use of his limbs. Voltaire fondly imagined that he disguised himself by now and then speaking of Voltaire (very warmly) as of a stranger. But he is known in the dark as soon as he opens his lips.

Strangely enough, the fourth volume of Rousseau's works closes with a letter of Voltaire to the publisher, M. Seguy. The letter is dated September 29, 1741, and was written in Brussels where Rousseau had died March 17th of the same year. Rather naïvely the publisher had asked Voltaire to subscribe to the collected works of the late poet "who had been his friend."

Voltaire answered that he would gladly subscribe although unfortunately he was one of the truest enemies of the deceased. He claimed this enmity was a great sorrow to him. He had always thought that writers should have brotherly feelings for each other. Were they not sufficiently persecuted? Did they have to add to each other's misery? It seems as though fate, in bringing him to the city where the famous and unfortunate Rousseau had ended his life, had wished to bring about a reconciliation; but the illness to which Rousseau succumbed had robbed Voltaire of the consolation for which both of them had yearned.

Words! Words! Words!

22

In March, 1724, Voltaire's tragedy *Marianne* was played at the *Comédie Française,* but had no success. It was pleasantly received when it was offered in

printed form, and two piracies appeared before Voltaire put his own edition on the market; but on the stage it did not go, and the poet was self-critical enough to admit that its failure was deserved. The same year he went with the Duke de Richelieu to the fashionable baths at Forges, where the two friends kept house together. The failure had exhausted Voltaire somewhat and his health as usual worried him. The waters did him much good, and after a short time he felt well. Later, however, he was debilitated by the treatment, and Richelieu, who had been appointed Ambassador to Vienna, urged him to accompany him there. Voltaire wished to let Thiriot go in his stead, but Thiriot was too lazy to care about his future.

In Forges, Voltaire lived among prominent people, saw daily the Duchess de Béthune-Sully, the Princess de Guise, later mother-in-law of the Duke de Richelieu, and the Marquise de Prie. For a month Forges became Paris, and it was in Forges that he won the true friendship of the Marquise de Prie; and that meant something. At that moment she was France's real Regent.

The Duchess de Berri had died in May, 1719. December 2, 1723, the Regent had expired suddenly and Duke Henri de Bourbon at once became Prime Minister of the young King. Madame de Prie in turn, controlled the Duke de Bourbon by her gayety and her firm will. For financial adviser she had chosen Voltaire's protector, Pâris-Duverney.

Before she left Forges for Fontainebleau, she ordered her majordomo to prepare an apartment for Voltaire to occupy in the autumn. In letters to Madame de Bernières he affected indifference: but in reality he was now at the consummation of his wishes.

The young King, who, during his entire life was celebrated and adored like an idol, even by Voltaire, is the gloomiest figure in French history: handsome, elegant, not stupid, but apathetic, heartless, without sense of duty, ice-cold, surfeited. At the age of fourteen Louis XV looked eighteen and physically mature.

He was surrounded by pages each more perverted than the other. There was the young Epernon, son of the Count de Toulouse; he was the clinging vine type; there was the young Duke de Gesvres (nephew of the handsome Cardinal de Rohan), who loved dainty embroidery; there was the young Duke de Trémouille, first gentleman of the bed chamber, who, in 1724, was discovered to have made the King his Ganymede. At the age of sixteen he dominated the King in every respect. Without shame he appeared as the rival of Mademoiselle de Charolais, the sister of the Duke de Bourbon, who had tried in vain to make a conquest of the King. Gesvres, jealous of La Trémouille, revealed to the Duke de Bourbon the behavior of the young Court.

It was not easy to offer actual interference. There were too many who openly professed their abhorrence of women, among them the Minister Maurepas and the Abbé Fleury, the former tutor of the King, who was indispensable to him.

The mildest measures were taken; the Duke de Trémouille was forced to marry. He yielded, but for eight years did not live with his wife. It was of importance to arouse the King's appetite for women. The best thing was to get him married as soon as possible. A list was made of seventeen princesses who might be suitable; among them was an English, a Portuguese, a Danish, a Prussian, a Russian, one from Modena, one from Saxony—one from Eisenach, one from Lorraine, all young—some too young—only a few Roman Catholic, although the religion, of course, was of the highest importance.

Without any great deliberation the Duke de Bourbon and Madame de Prie decided in favor of the Duke's sister, the lovely twenty-one-year-old Princess de Vermandois, a sane and healthy girl who was being educated in a convent near Paris. The Duke wrote an extensive memorandum, in which she was preferred to all the other young ladies.

It was important for the Marquise de Prie, whose future depended on it, to ascertain how easily the young Princess would let herself be used as a tool, and how much gratitude she could be expected to

show the one to whom she owed her advancement. So, she resolved to get acquainted with the young lady. She went to the convent where the Princess was staying, was introduced to her under an assumed name, and set to work carefully, letting the Princess first suspect, then clearly see the high position she was meant to assume. The young girl was too proud to show joy. Madame de Prie, in order to get an idea of the young lady's attitude, asked her opinion of Madame de Prie. The Princess responded vehemently that she loathed that malicious creature: that she pitied her brother because of his daily contact with the most universally abhorred woman in France. The Marquise left the reception room of the convent with these words: "You may be sure that you'll never become Queen!"

To the Duke, however, she was clever enough to praise the beauty of his gifted sister; she left it to Pâris-Duverney to find reasons to show this marriage as not desirable. Pâris-Duverney was nervous lest Mademoiselle de Vermandois destroy his influence as well as that of his protectress. He told the Duke that Fleury, who, as beloved tutor of the young King, was very powerful, did not approve of the marriage, and should it be pressed would surely try to prejudice the King against the Duke; aside from that, his sister, as Queen, would most probably blindly obey her mother, the old Duchess, thus making the Duke dependent upon the dowager.

Another princess was sought, one of less independent character whose gratitude could be relied upon. She was found in Maria, twenty-one-year-old daughter of Stanislaw Leszczynska.

Stanislaw was King only in name, since August the Strong had dispossessed him after his short reign in Poland. Stanislaw had not only lost his kingdom; his estates, too, had been taken away from him except a pension granted by Charles XII. He now lived like a pauper with wife and daughter in Weissenburg in Alsace, associating only with a few officers of the garrison and a few priests. All his efforts to find a marriage for his daughter somewhat in accordance with her rank, had come to naught. Naturally, he received

the letter telling him that his Maria had been chosen to become Queen of France, with astonishment and delight. Two physicians sent from Paris found the young girl to be healthy and a virgin, and on May 27, 1725, the young King publicly declared his wish to marry the Princess Maria Leszczynska. Her dowry was so meager that Madame de Prie had to bring chemises for her. On August 15, the Duc d'Orléans, acting as proxy for the King, was married to the Princess in Strassburg. Here Madame de Prie won Maria over entirely. On September fifth the marriage was celebrated at Versailles with great pomp. As is well known, Louis XV to everyone's surprise, was sensually in love with his not too comely and very pious wife, who, too, treated him very warmly. But about a year later a political event caused this relationship to cool.

On August 27, Voltaire journeyed to Fontainebleau. "My address is in care of Madame de Prie," he wrote to Thiriot. The little comedy *L'Indiscret* (about a young man who loses the favor of his beloved because he had been so indiscreet as to boast of her) was dedicated to the Marquise, thus:

Vous qui possédez la beauté
Sans être vaine ni coquette,
Et l'extrême vivacité
Sans être jamais indiscrète;
Vous à qui donnèrent les dieux
Tant de lumières naturelles,
Un esprit juste, gracieux,
Solide dans le sérieux
Et charmant dans les bagatelles,
Souffrez qu'on présente à vos yeux
D'aventure d'un téméraire
Qui, pour s'être vanté de plaire,
Perdit ce qu'il aimait le mieux.

Si l'héroïne de la pièce,
De Prie, eut votre beauté,
On excuserait la faiblesse
Qu'il eut de s'être un peu vanté
Quel amant ne serait tenté
De parler de telle maîtresse
Par un excès de vanité
Ou par un excès de tendresse!

Those familiar with Voltaire's works will remember a fantasy presented the previous year at the Villa Bélébat near Fontainebleau. The occasion was the marriage of the Marquise de Livry to the Master of the Hunt, the jovial good-for-nothing M. de Mauconseil. The piece was probably not written by Voltaire alone.

President Hénault and others helped him. Of everything he wrote it most nearly resembles Bellmann, and none of his works is so like Watteau.

Bélébat was situated in the parish of Courdimanche. The priest was an ass, a glutton, a soak, an imbecile and a poet; he was a perfect character, therefore, for the central rôle, which was played by Voltaire. He is represented drunk, making his last will and confessing his sins in a song with the refrain *Confiteor*. Our interest in *La Fête de Bélébat* lies in the fact that after the singing of the chorus:

> Que de tous côtés on entende
> Le bon nom de Voltaire et qu'il soit célèbre etc.

the Marquise de Prie crowns Voltaire with laurel, as she sings a short song which gives him credit for all the pleasure of the performance. Later in the play, when the chorus sings the praises of the Marquise, Voltaire appears in his own character, and, addressing the gorgeous lady, tells her that, though he is honored by her wreath, a kiss from her lips would be better:

> Vous connaissez Alain, ce poète fameux,
> Qui s'endormit un jour au palais de la reine:
> Il en reçut un baiser amoureux;
> Mais il dormait et la faveur fut vaine.
> Vous me pourriez payer d'un prix plus doux,
> Et si votre bouche vermeille
> Doit quelque chose aux vers que je chante pour vous
> N'attendez pas que je sommeille.

The young Queen pleased everyone by her gentleness, her simplicity, modesty, and politeness. She was properly grateful to the Duke de Bourbon for having made her Queen of France, but she was especially delighted with the flattery and loving attentions of the Marquise de Prie, who constantly came to her

rooms to see what she was doing, to offer her services, to advise the Queen or even dictate her letters.

Voltaire, therefore, had reason to hope that he, too, would soon be favored by the Queen. He wrote to Madame de Bernières that he would not be so indiscreet as to be introduced to the Queen during these hectic, unsettled days; he preferred to wait until the crowd had dispersed and Her Majesty had sufficiently found herself in her new surroundings. Then he would arrange to have *Œdipe* or *Marianne* played before her, and would dedicate one of his new plays to her. She had sent word that she would be pleased to have him do this. The King and Queen of Poland (August the Strong was not recognized at Versailles) had asked him to read them the *Henriade,* which the Queen of France, too, had heard highly spoken of. But he was in no hurry.

Soon he was introduced to the Queen and had reason to be pleased. On October 17, 1725, he writes to Thiriot: "She cried over *Marianne,* she smiled when she heard *L'Indiscret.* She often talks to me. She calls me *mon pauvre Voltaire.*" Rivals appear on the scene: other poets, like Didier, petitioning for an annual pension. The Duke de Montmart, keeper of the Queen's privy purse, gives Didier his answer: "If you must be a poet, be a poet like Voltaire." And the Queen grants Voltaire, without his asking, a yearly sum of fifteen hundred livres from her civil list. He sees this as the first step toward the realization of his most cherished dream: to be a personage of standing and importance at Court. "I am on good terms with the second Prime Minister (a curious expression) Duverney. I may count upon Madame de Prie's friendship. I don't complain any more of life at Court; I am beginning to have reasonable hope of being able to help my friends now and then." (Letter of November 13, 1725, to Madame de Bernières.)

He seems to have nearly grasped all a young man of even his unusual abilities could dream of at that time.

At the age of thirty-one, he is regarded as the foremost poet of France; a splendid career is open to him as a courtier. He has a yearly pension from the King,

another from the Queen. He has the good-will and active protection of the woman who through the Prime Minister and "the second Prime Minister" exerts a powerful influence on the government, and whose hold on the Queen is incontestable because the Queen is indebted to her for her own position. His early ambition in literature has been gratified. But now there opens before him the prospect of the rich fulfillment of another dream—political ambition, which he had silently, and for long vainly, fostered. He feels that he is no less intelligent than the abbés, bishops and cardinals, who have ruled France before and during his lifetime, and he believes in the sovereignty of intellect. He begins to see a golden future and his attitude takes on a composure that reveals his self-confidence.

High in favor, brilliant, talented, energetic, he stands at the first glorious climax of his life.

The crash was sudden.

23

Pâris-Duverney met with no success. He had tried to impose a general tax, not exempting the clergy or nobility, of one-fiftieth of the entire income, but popular resentment vetoed the plan unconditionally. The parliaments and provincial towns returned a most emphatic "No!" The farmers brandished their hay-forks; they were plagued with enough taxes already. A real storm of hatred, however, against him as well as against his protectress, Madame de Prie, was let loose because of his decree canceling the pensions granted by Louis XIV and reducing drastically those granted under the regency. The anger of the Court was so hot that neither Pâris-Duverney nor Madame de Prie dared appear in Versailles.

In their distress they could not even look for support from the Queen: for the King had begun to lose interest in her. The brief intoxication had worn off, and Maria Leszczynska, destitute of coquetry or any other charm that could enable her to recapture the wandering affections of her spouse, ruined her cause

by her childish oddities, such as her fear of ghosts, her senseless coolness, her wanting to have somebody always around to hold her hand when she was frightened by anything, and her disgusting habit of getting up at night and running around the bedroom to look for her little pet dog.

Sadly, Madame de Prie watched the union grow cold. In her antipathy to the King's tutor, old Fleury, the bishop de Fréjus, she laid all the blame on his influence. It was plain that he disliked Maria Leszczynska. And with the gradual weakening of the Queen's hold upon the King, the questionable companions of his youth—the little Duke des Gesvres and all the rest—began to come back and form a close circle about him. Both Minister Maurepas and Bishop Hercule de Fleury were woman haters and kept a close watch on the young King's intimate friendships.

As there was no place in Versailles where such misogynists could meet, they had their club in Paris, in the house of a nobleman from Lorraine, Paul Edouard Deschauffours. He was a genial man of good family, who had lost his fortune and now tried to win it back by making his house a meeting-place for the abnormal.

The attitude of the authorities to them was uncertain. The tribunal had, indeed, the right to burn at the stake anyone convicted of sodomy, but was indulgent to those who were considered too great to be affected by such measures. In March, 1724, a mule-herd had been burned at the stake in the Place de Grève. In December of the same year a new case of that kind came into court. It concerned the Abbé François Guyot Desfontaines, a man of some literary consequence. He had studied at the Jesuit college and taught there for fifteen years, and had written odes as well as criticisms. Among the latter was a book of *Literary Paradoxes* in which he satirized La Motte with especial viciousness. He was the editor of the *Journal des Savants,* which had not appeared for seven months previous to his arrest. He had made a piracy of Voltaire's still unpublished *La Ligue* (*Henriade*) and had the impudence to insert a couplet against La Motte in the fifth canto:

En dépit des Pradons, des Perrauts, des Houdarts
On verra le bon goût fleurir de toutes parts.

The first time he got off; but in April, 1725, he was arrested and this time the accusations brought against him by two chimney-sweeps would almost certainly have sent him to the stake.

Apparently he cannot have had many protectors, since in his extremity he approached a man to whom he had been introduced only two weeks before. He appealed to Voltaire for help. And with that innate humanity which was the key-note of Voltaire's character, he got up from a sick-bed to ride to Fontainebleau and ask Fleury and Madame de Prie, then still omnipotent, to issue a pardon to the poor wretch who meant nothing to him, indeed whom he hardly knew. He saved Desfontaine's life, and thus, as is well known, succored a snake who became for the next twenty years his spiteful, tireless enemy.

Voltaire's action was the more noble, in that in his first poetic work he had argued in favor of the normal sexual relation, as opposed to homosexuality.

Now the influential clique of these abnormals attacked Voltaire's protectress, the Marquise de Prie, and the Duke de Bourbon. It was this crowd that persuaded the King to cast off the Queen, and thus prevented Bourbon and Madame de Prie from exerting any influence on the Monarch.

The Duke as well as Madame de Prie knew very well that in Fleury they had an adversary who as royal tutor had influence over the King, and he would surely be the last person to stimulate the King's interest in his wife. So they decided to destroy him. How pitifully small was their knowledge of mankind! Using the Queen for their tool they only succeeded in making the King dislike her more than ever. Apparently the Duke never suspected that the King really hated him and that the seemingly cold young man simply could not live without Fleury.

One day the Duke de Bourbon requested the Queen to get him a private audience with the King (that meant: a meeting at which Fleury was not present). Under some pretext Louis XV was called to the

Queen. She wanted to withdraw, but the Duke asked her to stay and hear what he had to say. He began to read a letter from Cardinal de Polignac in Rome, which was nothing but a lengthy indictment of Fleury. The King was bored. When the Duke wished to continue the King gave unmistakable signs of impatience. The Duke, hurt, wished to know: was His Majesty displeased with him? His Majesty said yes, he was. Was His Majesty unfavorably inclined toward him? —Yes.—Was the Bishop de Fréjus the only one to enjoy his confidence?—Yes.—And when the Duke fell upon his knees the King pushed him back and left the room in anger, mainly at the Queen, who had enticed him into this trap.

Meanwhile Fleury, wishing to see the King, had been confronted by doors locked by the order of the Duke. After waiting several hours to be admitted, he departed for Issy. In a temper, the King had locked himself into his rooms, and when the Duke de Montmart saw how things were going, he procured a decree ordering the Duke de Bourbon to bring the King his tutor at once. Deeply humiliated, the Duke had to obey.

If he and Madame de Prie were to rise again, a great blow must be struck. The whole cabal that met at Deschauffours', including a senator, two bishops (Saint-Agnan and La Fare), and several other highly placed gentlemen, would have to be intimidated and ridiculed, but the main thing was to make ridiculous the set, whose vices everyone knew but nobody called by name.

Just then occurred an event which for a moment caused the scale to dip in Madame de Prie's favor and gave her fresh courage.

Madame de Tencin had the misfortune to have one of her lovers commit suicide. This was very awkward. The lady had a thrifty habit of accepting cash presents from her admirers, not from one at a time but from so many as to make quite a nice thing of it. Bolingbroke was one of her victims, until his eyes were opened. One, the senator La Fresnaye, was driven to frenzy by the number of rivals his mistress encouraged. On top of this came the loss of his for-

tune. He went to the rooms where she lived as sister and wife of the Archbishop de Tencin—the same rooms in which these two had hatched the scheme to get Fleury a cardinal's hat—and shot himself in her presence. He left a will, full of terrifying revelations concerning Madame de Tencin, of her way of living and of collecting a fortune.

It was very embarrassing: What should be done with the corpse? Instead of reporting to the police and having the body removed, Madame de Tencin hurriedly notified her friends, the President and the Procurator of the Great Tribunal, and these high officials had the body put in quicklime so they could render a verdict of death from apoplexy. The Great Tribunal considered the matter settled. The Tribunal of the Châtelet, however, was not content with this explanation. It ordered the lady arrested and brought to the Châtelet. But Fleury and Maurepas, in Versailles, did not cease their efforts until Madame de Tencin was freed from strict confinement and given temporary lodging in the Bastille.

Nevertheless, it was a great defeat for Fleury and the other enemies of Madame de Prie. Fleury even spoke of retiring. On April 20, 1726, Madame de Prie wrote to the Duke de Richelieu: "Everything is all right again. I am more at ease." At that time the police commissioner was Réné Hénault, the same of whom Voltaire had once asked what was done with people who forged *lettres de cachet*. He answered: "They are hanged."—"And anyhow that's something, until the same can be done with those who sign the genuine," answered Voltaire.

Hénault owed his position, indeed, his career, to Madame de Prie, and she counted upon him as a tool. Were he faithful and courageous he could take up the battle against her enemies in Versailles. She counted even more upon her satirist, her young poet friend, who in his very first composition (*Anti-Giton*) had revealed himself as a dangerous opponent to the Mignons: recently in his *Festival Play in Bélébat* addressed to Madame de Prie, he proved himself no less keen an enemy of the Catholic clergy.

But, Hénault proved too weak. He was satisfied to

get hold of M. de Deschauffours and to let a hundred guilty escape. On the day of his conviction Deschauffours was burned at the stake. Consequently this nobleman was of no use as a witness for the State.

As for Voltaire, before Madame de Prie could make use of him his fangs were drawn. Hénault himself put the poet *hors de combat* by sending him to the Bastille.

It was all over with Madame de Prie; she became sick, emaciated, even ugly. One day Fleury made the suave suggestion to the Duke, that it would be possible to put in order the difficult conditions at Court, if Madame de Prie and Pâris-Duverney "would go to the country."

When she disregarded this warning and remained in Versailles her enemies made short work of her. One day the King rode to Rambouillet to hunt, and the same evening granted the Duke an interview. The King seemed friendly enough; but the Duke had scarcely departed, when he was handed a *lettre de cachet,* which exiled him to Chantilly, forbade him to hunt, which he loved, and drove him to complete despair. Madame de Prie was ordered to take up her domicile in Courbépine, in Normandy, where she raged in hurt pride for some time and then committed suicide by poison. Pâris-Duverney was taken to the Bastille, where he was kept for eighteen months. After his release he was persecuted with a foolish judicial action that had no result.

24

Voltaire also suffered from the overthrow of his protectors. The man who had made up his mind to humiliate him and get him out of the way, was a degenerate without ability or virtue, a man of a great family, who was known to be a coward and who lived on usury.

It was in December, 1725, that one evening at the Opera the Chevalier de Rohan-Chabot called to him in a very offensive manner: "Monsieur de Voltaire,

Monsieur Arouet, what is your name?"—According to several witnesses, the poet answered: "I don't drag a long name after me; but I do know how to bring honor upon the name I have."—Other witnesses report the famous retort: "My name begins with me; yours ends with you." The last is more credible, as he made use of almost the same phrase in *Rome Sauvée*, where he has Cicero respond to Cataline:

> Mon nom commence en moi. De votre honneur jaloux,
> Tremblez que votre nom finisse dans vous!

Several days later Voltaire and the Chevalier again came face to face in the Théâtre Français, in the loge of Adrienne Lecouvreur. Rohan repeated his insolent question, whereupon Voltaire referred him to his answer of the night at the Opera. Rohan raised his stick, remarking that he would continue this conversation with a thrashing. When in reply Voltaire put his hand on his hilt, Adrienne Lecouvreur feigned a fainting spell, which for the time being ended the quarrel.

On February 4, Voltaire lunched at the house of Duke de Sully, where, according to the expression used in the memoires of President Hénault, "he was regarded as a son of the house." A servant notified him that someone waited to see him at the gate of the palace. He went down stairs. A coach stood at the gate. Two men met him and asked him to mount the step. He did so believing that whoever wanted to talk to him was seated inside the coach. But scarcely had he obeyed the request when he was seized and a shower of blows rained upon his shoulders. Six lackeys stood around him. From a second coach standing at a short distance the Chevalier de Rohan directed the attack, crying out among other commands: "Don't hit him on the head; that part of him may produce something good yet." And the crowd which had gathered to watch the beating was touched by this evidence of solicitude: "Oh, what a good man!" was its cry.

When Voltaire succeeded in freeing himself, he returned at once to Sully's dining-room and asked the assistance of his host for a guest whose mistreatment

and humiliation must be shared by the one at whose table he had just eaten.

Here, however, he underwent the first cruel disappointment which was in store for him in his intercourse with people above him in birth. With unworthy and outrageous caution the Duke refused to interfere in a matter which he considered was none of his business.

Ten years of friendship were forgotten in that moment, in which, humiliated and misused, Voltaire stood before the Duke. Forgotten was the glory Voltaire had shed upon the name of Sully in the *Henriade,* by making an ancestor the inseparable friend of Henry IV. Deeply hurt, Voltaire replaced Sully in the poem by Duplessis-Mornay.

The Duke was not anxious to antagonize a family so powerful as the Rohan. Added to this—in spite of all the show of democracy which the aristocracy liked to make by inviting poets and writers to their tables —was the old contempt of the high born for the middle classes. To teach them to keep their proper distance, it would do no harm to remind them from time to time of the difference in station.

Recollect how helpless Molière was in his time. Even in England the Earl of Rochester instructed his negro servant to thrash Dryden in punishment for a satire which offended him. Among the most aristocratic of Voltaire's intimate friends there were not a few like the Prince de Conti and the Abbé Caumartin who had only pleasantly mocking remarks to make on this incident such as: "What should become of the rest of us if poets had no backs!"

From Sully's palace Voltaire hurried to the Opera where he was certain to meet Madame de Prie. He told her what had happened, received vivid sympathy and the promise that she would do what she could for him at Versailles. However, when it got that far the standing of the Duke de Bourbon proved too shaky and uncertain to permit him to challenge the Rohan family. Therefore, nothing was done. The poor victim of the thrashing tried to be unconcerned and continue his usual intercourse with his friends. As formerly he showed himself at Court and around

town. But nobody gave him sympathy and those upon whom he had counted turned away from him.

With his cool head and his hot temper Voltaire firmly resolved to get revenge. From morning to night he practiced fencing. He fenced with soldiers of the Guard. All his connection was with fighters and boxers. Again and again he challenged Rohan, but he was constantly watched by the police who wished to keep him from attacking a member of such an illustrious family.

A letter of the Police Commissioner to the Chief of the Criminal Police reads:

"Monsieur, His Royal Highness (Bourbon) has been informed that M. le Chevalier de Rohan is going out today and since he might plan a new attack on the Sieur de Voltaire, or the latter might commit some ill-considered action, it is the wish of His Royal Highness that you have the Sieur de Voltaire watched to prevent any consequence of a possible meeting."

A note of the Police Commissioner made on the basis of a report says:

"From reliable sources comes the information that the Sieur de Voltaire has the intention of insulting M. le Chevalier de Rohan without delay and in a sensational manner. Within the last six weeks he has repeatedly changed his residence, even his district, and it is known that at present he is staying with a certain Leynault, a fencing master in the rue Saint-Martin, where he keeps very bad company. It is said that he is friendly with soldiers of the Guard and that various bullies visit him. But regardless of how much of this is true or false, it is certain that he continues to harbor evil intentions and just as certain that he has summoned one of his relatives from the provinces to be his second. This relative, better balanced than M. de Voltaire, would like to calm him; but apparently this is not possible. M. de Voltaire is more excited and furious than ever in his behavior as well as in his remarks. All these reports make it seem to the Police Commissioner advisable, perhaps this very night, to carry out the King's order concerning the Sieur de Voltaire. He regards it as his duty to

prevent a breach of the peace of which he has been informed in advance."

One evening at last, Voltaire succeeded in finding Rohan in the loge of Adrienne Lecouvreur and said to him: "If your latest money-squeezing affair has not made you forget your insult to me, I hope that you will meet me man to man."

The Chevalier accepted the challenge for the next day and chose nine o'clock as the time, the Porte Saint-Martin as the place. However, he informed his family who at once took steps with the Duke de Bourbon to prevent the duel.

This action, unworthy of a nobleman, or of any man of honor inspired a few comments from the Marshal de Villars. He writes:

"On account of a fall which had impeded his movements, Rohan was not skilful with the sword. He took the measure of having Voltaire chastised by his lackeys in broad daylight. Instead of turning to the Courts, the latter thought it nobler to seek revenge with the sword. It is said that he sought satisfaction ambitiously and recklessly. The Cardinal de Rohan therefore requested the Duke to have Voltaire taken to the Bastille; the order was given and executed, and the unfortunate poet on top of his thrashing was arrested. The public, always ready to criticize, in this instance found rightly that both parties were at fault: Voltaire in insulting the Chevalier de Rohan; the latter by committing a crime which warranted the death penalty—he had a French citizen thrashed. The government itself was at fault in failing to punish an act generally considered criminal, and in sending the aggrieved party to the Bastille to quiet the aggressor."

It is astonishing that among all Voltaire's friends and protectors the Marshal is the only one to regard Rohan's behavior as absolutely culpable. Even he has enough aristocratic prejudice to consider Voltaire also in the wrong in answering Rohan so sharply. And it is noteworthy that Villars here uses the word citizen to signify one who was considered inferior. This was sixty years before the revolution.

Voltaire was arrested on the night of April 18, 1726,

and taken to the Bastille. The police report says that he had two pocket pistols on his person. His family, Hénault maintains, was quite satisfied with this action, which prevented the young man from committing a fresh offense and which saved his relatives from any consequences. The Jansenist Armand, Voltaire's elder brother, apparently could not get over the fact that his family should have made an enemy of the family whose motto was: *Roi ne puys, Duc ne daygne, Rohan suys.*

However the persons involved were thoroughly conscious of committing a wrong, which they excused as a necessity. This can be seen from a letter which was sent by Hénault to Condé, the Governor of the Bastille:

"You have failed to report to me either Voltaire's or Madame de Tencin's incarceration in the Bastille, although I myself signed the orders in virtue of which they were taken there . . . the Sieur de Voltaire possesses a genius which demands consideration. His Royal Highness has asked me to inform you that it is the King's intention to grant him every concession and liberty which does not jeopardize his safe detention."

Apparently the authorities did not want to deny a family, at whose head was the *Grand Aumônier of France,* a trifle like the arrest of a private citizen. On the other hand, everything was done to soften the penalty. Voltaire was in the Bastille, side by side with Madame de Tencin, whose beauty had in him an eager admirer, whose nephew, the Comte d'Argental, was his most intimate friend. As soon as he was released, Voltaire informed D'Argental that his greatest sorrow during his stay in the Bastille was that she, too, was made to suffer the same penalty. "We were," he wrote to Madame de Feriol (Madame de Tencin's sister) "like Pyramus and Thisbe. It was but a wall that separated us; but we did not kiss, as they did, through a cleft in the wall."

He dined at the table of the Governor and was permitted to receive the visits of his friends. He felt hurt that several whom he asked to come, such as Thiriot, Madame de Bernières, and Madame du Def-

fand, stayed away; but Hénault had interfered and the permission was limited to five or six persons, whose names were approved by him.

From prison Voltaire wrote to the Minister of Justice:

"The Sieur de Voltaire most respectfully brings to your knowledge that he was murderously assaulted by the brave Chevalier de Rohan with the assistance of six bandits behind whom he himself very courageously took his stand. The Sieur de Voltaire has since continuously sought for an opportunity to re-establish, not his own, but the Chevalier's honor, which proved to be too difficult. Admittedly Voltaire went to Versailles, but it is not true that he pushed his pursuit to the home of Cardinal de Rohan. He can easily prove the contrary, and offers to spend his whole life in the Bastille if he be not correct on this point. He requests the privilege of dining with the Governor and of receiving visitors. Still more urgently he asks permission for immediate departure for England. Should anybody question his departure an officer could escort him to Calais."

On May second, Condé received the order to release Voltaire on condition that he go in exile to England. Condé was to accompany him as far as Calais and see him embark and leave the harbor.

Voltaire on his journey was to pass through Paris. Hastily he wrote to his friend, Madame de Bernières, asking her to lend him her coach which Condé would return to her. He also asked her to come with Thiriot and Madame du Deffand to tell him good-bye.

On May fifth he reached Calais where he had to wait four or five days for a boat. When he reached England, he did not at once find himself contented.

But his exile was destined to be highly profitable to his further development, and what had been meant as a penalty, became an inestimable benefit.

IV

ENGLAND

1

It was a perfect day in May, under a clear and cloudless sky, when Voltaire landed in England; a mild west wind blew over the banks of the Thames, whose fresh green delighted the eye of the exiled poet. As far as he could see the river was covered by merchant vessels all sails reefed in a salute to the King who was being rowed downstream in a gilded barge led by other boats with musicians, and followed by thousands of little boats. The rowers of the royal barge were dressed like French pages of an earlier day in white puffy trousers and short jackets with little silver tabs on the shoulders.

Thus in his first glimpse he got an impression of the fresh life and the conservative, typically British, retention of ancient costumes.

At the same time he could see the thousands of people on the banks, on foot or on horseback, eagerly watching the horse-racing and athletic contests.

He reached London the same evening where he attended a party of ladies and gentlemen of the highest circles, and spent the night at Lord Bolingbroke's in Pall-Mall. To these people he described his impressions of the forenoon: the Olympian pageant, the throng of elegant young men and women he had seen dashing over the commons to see the horse-races, the pedestrians, the knots of well-dressed gentlemen and of pretty, simply clad young girls whose look of healthy contentment had been a joy to look upon. The ladies explained to him that the people who mattered took no part in these vulgar amusements; the young dandies who had attended the races like

men-about-town were nothing more than students and apprentices on hired horses, and the pretty young ladies in cotton dresses on foot or on horseback were nothing but chambermaids and country lasses out in their Sunday best.

Thus his first evening gave him some notion of the class distinctions in England. At the same time, however, he realized that the British lower class was not at all oppressed, on the contrary, was very content.

Bolingbroke, ever since he had negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht, was a great man in France. In the Paris Opera everybody stood up when he entered. Though he had not regained his political influence in England, he was pardoned, after his complete break with the Pretender, and now he divided his time between his mansion in London and his estate in Dawley, Middlesex, which he preferred. Dawley took the place of his French manor, *La Source,* which he was about to give up.

Before Voltaire's arrival Bolingbroke could not overcome a certain doubt (as is shown by his letters) as to how Voltaire would keep his promise to dedicate the *Henriade* to him and as to what he would say about him in the dedication. He wisely assumed that the poet had forgotten his promise. This was the case, for, this work, undergoing constant revision—had in the course of time been intended for various protectors, like the blue purse in Musset's *Un Caprice,* which Madame de Blainville had crocheted so slowly that it had been intended for no less than three persons.—Several years later, however, Voltaire inscribed to Bolingbroke the tragedy *Brutus,* written from impressions of England; and the dedication was not couched in the conventional few words but in his *Discours sur la Tragédie,* in which he shows the loyal devotion to which his Lordship was justly entitled.

This was not the first time that he did public homage to Bolingbroke. The first occasion was the letter to Dr. Gervasi, after Bolingbroke had sat beside Voltaire's sick-bed:

> Et toi, cher Bolingbroke, héros qui d'Apollon
> As reçu plus d'une couronne,
> Qui réunis en ta personne

L'eloquence de Cicéron,
L'intrépidité de Caton,
L'esprit de Mécénas, l'agrément de Pétrone
Et la science de Varron,
Bolingbroke, à ma gloire il faut que je publie
Que tes soins, pendant le cours
De ma triste maladie,
Ont daigné marquer mes jours
Par le tendre intérêt que tu prends à ma vie.

Bolingbroke was widely enough acquainted with the English poets to introduce Voltaire to the important ones. He got along well with them, except when knowledge of the English language was essential. He called the triumvirs of England's Parnassus—Pope, Swift and Gay—by their first names. Voltaire could have had no better introduction.

2

He was not limited to Bolingbroke's Tory circle. He had, in France, met many important Englishmen, such as Lord Stair, the English ambassador to Paris, Bishop Atterbury, who lived in exile in France; and a rich and gifted merchant, Everard Falkener, who soon was to take an almost brotherly interest in him.

Typical of the customs of the times is the fact that Voltaire came to England, supplied with letters of recommendation from members of the same government which had condemned him to exile. The ministers apparently were a little ashamed of having had to expel a man not because of any wrong he had committed, but because of a wrong he had suffered.

The French Foreign Minister, Monsieur de Morville, asked Horatio Walpole, brother of the Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole, and Stair's successor as English ambassador to France, to do everything possible for Voltaire while he was in England. Horatio Walpole wrote to the Duke of Newcastle:

"I hope that you will excuse my commending to you—at the urgent request of Monsieur de Morville—Monsieur de Voltaire, a poet of great talent who has recently come to England to get out a subscription edition of an excellent poetic work, called *Henri IV*.

Although he was imprisoned in the Bastille, it was not because of any state matter but because of a personal quarrel with a private person, and I therefore hope that Your Excellency will give your support by recommending the subscription."

Likewise he wrote a letter to Bubb Dodington, Lord Melcombe, highly respected as a patron of literature, but of doubtful reputation as a politician. It commences like the letter to the Duke of Newcastle. Then it continues:

"Monsieur de Morville who in the furtherance of literature and learning, is France's Mæcenas or still better France's Dodington, has asked me to use my influence among my friends in support of the subscription. For this reason as well as because of the merits of this man I believe you to be the best person to approach; and at the same time I must confess that I am glad to make this the excuse for reopening a correspondence with you."

Bubb Dodington's poor reputation as politician came from the fact that in spite of his buying votes and of other dishonest campaigning, he did not succeed in being elected to Parliament. In private life he was clever and witty, a great defender of the intellectuals. For three months Voltaire lived in his Eastbury house, and later always recalled him gratefully as a very rich and active man, talented and courageous. Later he introduced Thiriot to him, recommending him gracefully by saying that before he had sent Dodington his *History of Charles XII,* now, however, he sent him something far better.

In Eastbury Voltaire met Edward Young, later well known as a didactic poet. Voltaire became his friend. This was before Young became a mystic. He had not yet written his *Night Thoughts,* which Voltaire later called "a confused mixture of bombast and obscure trivialities." After an unpromising youth he had gained some respect as a lyric poet and dramatist, but still tried to increase his reputation by flattering famous personages. At any rate he was an unusually brilliant conversationalist.

In Eastbury Voltaire also met James Thomson, the popular author of the *Seasons* who gave him the im-

pression "of great genius and great simplicity." In his *Autumn* Thomson refers to Eastbury:

> Oh, lose me in the green delightful walks
> Of Dodington, thy seat, serene and plain,
> Where simple Nature reigns.

Voltaire, from the beginning was accepted by the Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, by the Duke of Newcastle, by the widow of the Duke of Marlborough, and by the Court of the King as well as that of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

To George I he had six years previously paid his respects, by sending him, in 1718, his *Œdipe*. He accompanied it by verses whose flattery nowadays seems absurd. The poem begins:

> Toi que la France admire autant que l'Angleterre,
> Qui de l'Europe en feu balances les destins;
> Toi qui chéris la paix dans le sein de la guerre
> Et qui n'es armé du tonnerre
> Que pour le bonheur des humains.

The King ordered Lord Stair to present him with a watch, and Voltaire had the watch sent to his father to impress upon him that his son received presents from the King of England.

3

Shortly after his arrival in England Voltaire had the misfortune to run short of cash. He had taken with him to London a letter of credit for twenty thousand francs on a Jewish banker by the name of Acosta; but as he did not need the money at once he postponed its presentation. When he finally went to the bank he was told that Acosta had become bankrupt the day before. He could give him a few gold pieces only. If the story is true that King George I, hearing of this misfortune, sent the poet one hundred pounds, the sum was very welcome. For he had not yet received any payments under his father's will, and by his exile he had lost the pensions granted him by the King and Queen of France.

This lack of funds hampered him considerably at the beginning of his stay. The custom of the time required the guest to give large tips to the servants and so it was difficult for him to accept any invitations. When he was invited a second time to Lord Chesterfield's, he declined; the meal would have been too expensive for him. In February, 1727, he asks Thiriot to locate the people who owe him money.

Thanks to his recommendations Voltaire was favorably received by the Prime Minister, in spite of his friendly connections with Bolingbroke and the latter's Tory circle. Robert Walpole was interested in politics, not in literature; his wife, however, showed a lively interest in the poet, and so did his young son who was still at Eton, the Horace Walpole who was later to become famous in France, especially as the object of the enthusiastic adoration of the blind Madame du Deffand.

In a letter to her son Lady Walpole described the visit of the famous Frenchman to her house. This visit was excitedly talked of between him and his school comrades, and even forty years later, in a letter to Voltaire, Horace Walpole showed what an impression this event made upon him. He wrote:

"Your glory has not been unknown to me since, but I remember that, young as I was, I regarded it as the greatest honor to our house that you lunched with my mother that day, although I was still at school and was not so fortunate as to see you. My father was at that period in a position which might have blinded other eyes than mine."

At first Voltaire could talk with French speaking people only. Although in his early youth he had learned to read a little English and had English books brought to him during his stay in the Bastille, he was unable to express himself in understandable English. His first visit at Pope's country estate at Twickenham therefore turned into a comic fiasco: Voltaire's English proved to be entirely unintelligible and Pope could not speak a word of French and even read it with great difficulty. Much later, when Voltaire not only read English but wrote it fluently, he still was unable to overcome the difficulties of

pronunciation. In the preface to a little book which he published in English at the end of 1727 he confesses that he still could not pronounce English: that he had learned it as one would learn Latin and Greek, that it was as hard for him to understand the spoken language as it would be for us to understand the pronunciation of the people of antiquity, if we could hear them.

Ultimately his ear did get used to the sound, his tongue to the pronunciation. His acquaintance with Colley Ciber gave Voltaire the opportunity to visit Drury Lane Theatre. Chetwood, who had been there as prompter for twenty years, used to furnish him each evening with a copy of the play. Voltaire took it to his seat so he could follow the performance. Within four or five months he learned to write the language, though not with exactness. As a matter of fact, even his French was weak in this respect. At that time spelling was not considered important. Voltaire spelled even proper names incorrectly, now one way, now another. (Thus he always spells Law as Lass.) After several more months he understood conversations he overheard, and was able to express himself fluently.

This knowledge was a great help once, when he was taking a walk in the streets of London. After the numerous wars between England and France a Frenchman was far from a popular figure on the streets of London, and some toughs who could not get used to this foreign looking character called after him and were about to throw stones at him. To prevent their attack, he stopped and mounted a milestone and from that eminence delivered a harangue: "Brave Englishmen! Am I not unfortunate enough in not having been born among you?" He was such a success that the mob that had insulted him crowded around him and wanted to carry him to his home, so delighted were they that a foreigner had spoken to them in such excellent English.

The letters Voltaire wrote from London to Thiriot were written in English, just to annoy the censors who opened them. From remarks of his contemporaries we can see that every time he wanted to confide any-

thing to Madame du Châtelet in the presence of others, he used English. As late as 1764 he spoke fluently to visitors in Ferney and recited by heart selections from Dryden. In the last year of his life he spoke English with Franklin.

In London he even got into the habit of working in the native language. He began his *Brutus* thus, and in his dedication to Bolingbroke he explains that he had grown so used to thinking in English that after his return to France it was rather difficult for him to think in French.

What is still more striking, he wrote the *Civil War in France* as well as the *Essai sur la Poésie Epique* in English, not French. When it seemed to him of importance to publish the latter in French he could not bring himself to translate it, but—with little knowledge of human nature—entrusted the task to the scoundrel Desfontaines, who had pirated and abused the *Henriade*. Desfontaines knew so little English that he translated the word *cake* by *Cacus* (giant).

Voltaire seems for a while to have become entirely reconciled to the fact that his exile would last a very long time. The influence of the Rohan family was not likely to diminish.

In his very interesting and unusually instructive *Advice to a Journalist*[1] (1737) Voltaire winds up his dissertation with the question what language the well-equipped French journalist should master. His answer is worth noting: "A good journalist must know English and Italian; for many works of genius were written in these two languages and genius can scarcely ever be translated." German was not included. Even much later, Frederick the Great spoke French and wrote all his works in French. In England, too, at that time French was the official language at Court. The German born George I could not speak English. Voltaire during the first half year of his stay in London was limited to circles where French was spoken.

One of these was the home of Bolingbroke. The

[1] *Journalist* in the meaning of the time was a contributor to journals; an essayist; a critic.

mistress of the house was a Frenchwoman, the former Madame de Villette. By her own account, after all the years she had lived with Bolingbroke she knew the meaning of "very warm" and "very cold"; but further than this her knowledge of the English language did not go. Hence the entire conversation in this house, as far as the lady of the house entered into it, was French. Chiefly French also was the erudition of the master of the house.

The circle which first attracted Voltaire was the clique of French fugitives which met in the Rainbow-Coffeehouse, in Marylebone. Several of the clique welcomed Voltaire; others—like Saint-Hyacinthe—persecuted him from the first with petty criticism and later became his enemies.

Voltaire at once recognized that, if he wished to derive any benefit from his stay in this foreign country, he must learn its language thoroughly. About the middle of the next century another eminent Frenchman, Victor Hugo, spent twenty years on British soil without learning English. Such was not the nature of the passionately inquisitive Voltaire.

4

Voltaire was not the sort of man to submit to his fate. From the beginning he sought companionship, except when he wanted to work. But when he was alone he was consumed with furious anger at the ridicule he had suffered without getting any satisfaction. He had been punished with exile for his efforts to defend his honor.

He could stand it no longer; it became his obsession, and after a stay of several months in England he secretly returned to France to seek and punish his mocker.

In vain however he sought his enemy. It seemed, as he later wrote, as if Rohan were warned by the instinct of a coward. The search was fruitless, and fear of renewed arrest and incarceration forced Voltaire to return to London.

The letter he wrote on August 12, 1726, to Thiriot (he does not reveal from where, but certainly it was from the French coast) exhibits an unusual access of ill-humor. He feels as though uprooted from his native country; his hopes are destroyed, his future appears devoid of a ray of light.

In this letter he speaks of his short journey to Paris: Thiriot could probably imagine that, as he had not visited even him he had not visited anybody. He had hunted one man only but had not found him, and now he is about to make a headlong departure:

"Now it has happened, my dear Thiriot. The great probability is that I shall never see you again in all my life. I am still undecided whether to go to London. I know that England is a country where the fine arts are respected and appreciated, where although a distinction is drawn between classes, no distinction is drawn between men but that which is based on their merits. It is a country where one can think freely and keenly without having to fear slavery. If I were to follow my inclination I should settle there, with the purpose of learning to think. But I don't know whether my little fortune so severely reduced by travel-expenses, my increasingly poor health and my taste for perfect solitude will permit me to throw myself into the noise of Whitehall and London. I have excellent recommendations and I would have a warm welcome in England. I have not yet made up my mind to undertake the journey. There are only two things I have to settle in my entire life: the first is to risk it honorably as soon as I can; the second is to end it in the solitude which is in keeping with my misfortunes and my experience of mankind."

He goes on to say that he does not mind having to give up the pensions formerly granted to him by the King and Queen; that his only sorrow was that he could not transfer them to his friend, Thiriot. It would be a consolation to him in his solitude to be able to think that once more he could do something for his friend; but it was his fate to be unfortunate in every respect; the greatest pleasure an honest man could have—that of bringing joy to his friends —was denied to him.

What irony of fate! How superfluous was this worry of being unable to transfer his income to Thiriot! Soon enough the latter was to transfer Voltaire's income to his own account without asking or thanking him!

From Thiriot his thoughts turn to another friend, the last, the only one he wanted to see in Paris the day before his departure from France. Since then he had not heard from her. He does not know what Madame de Bernières thinks of him. And he cites a few verses, making a small alteration, from Racine's *Mithridate* (act II, scene IV):

> Prendrait elle le soin de rassurer mon cœur
> Contre la defiance attachée au malheur?

All his life he will cherish her friendship for him, and maintain his for her. He wishes her health and wealth, much pleasure and many friends "such as yourself, my dear Thiriot. . . . Speak to her sometimes of me!"

He was indebted to her in many respects. How active and energetic she had been when, in 1724, they were engaged in having *La Ligue* printed secretly in Rouen. How kind and solicitous she had been to him, when she gave him—and to avoid any evil gossip, Thiriot as well—shelter in her own house.

Nevertheless she was not one whose feelings can remain unchanged after a separation, and she was just as unlikely to stand up for anyone when it was not to her advantage. Not even over the unjust fate of her most intimate and dearest friend could she feel indignation.

Again what irony of fate! How superfluous was Voltaire's worry lest Madame de Bernières should miss a friend.

The first letter she sends to him in England informs him that she honestly had to confess, she had been to the Opera with the Chevalier de Rohan.

Voltaire, in his lengthy and affectionate answer (October 16, 1726), very mildly asks her to think of him once in a while so that, when he should see her again some day, he could find in her heart a sympathy which "at least would resemble friendship." He re-

marks very truly that most women know no middle-ground between passion and indifference. He would like so much to be able to hope for simple friendship. "I can forgive you for having been to the Opera with Chevalier de Rohan if you feel a little shame for it."

After this the correspondence seems to have stagnated. Madame de Bernières, after a period of mutual misunderstanding, separated from the President. She became a widow in 1734, and immediately married a man named Prudhomme, an officer of the *garde du corps;* she died in 1757. She was thirty-four years old when she became Voltaire's best friend, and four years later, though still his friend, she went to the theater with the man who had him thrashed.

About the same time a great sorrow came to Voltaire. He received the news of the death of his only sister. How profoundly this loss affected him is shown in his letter to an old friend of the Arouet family, Mademoiselle de Bessières.

5

Voltaire met the most generous hospitality at the home of the rich London merchant Falkener, whose luxurious country estate "Wandsworth" was entirely at his disposal. It was here that he devoted his time to the study of English, and that he later wrote in English the first act of his *Brutus* and his two essays in the same language.

Ballantyne has pointed out the passionate love of liberty expressed in this English-French *Brutus* and the many allusions to the situation between England and France as well as to Voltaire's own fate. In the two following verses Greece stands for England; Ionia, France;

> La Grèce entière est libre et la molle Ionie
> Sous un joug odieux languit assujettie.

It is of his own unjust arrest that he speaks in these words:

Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupçons,
C'est agir en tyrans.

And apparently he was thinking of the submission of the French to the tyranny of King and Church when in *Brutus* he says:

Escloves de leur rois, et même de leurs prêtres,
Les Toscans semblent nés pour servir sous des maîtres.

In his essay on epic poetry which was written in English, a fiery love of freedom is revealed. Voltaire's forceful English style proclaims:

Liberty of thought is the life of the soul. . . . It is a great misfortune that there are so few French imitators of our neighbours, the English. We have been obliged to adopt their physical science, to imitate their financial system, to build our ships on their plan; when shall we imitate them in the noble liberty of allowing the mind to take all the flight of which it is capable?

His illness and depression made the visit in the little village a few miles out of London highly desirable. He therefore retained a deep gratitude for Falkener; he was delighted when his host, who had acquired his fortune by the sale of Eastern silks and fabrics, was appointed ambassador to Constantinople —a contrast to French practice. And in 1732, Voltaire dedicated to him a work half in prose, half in poetry, the tragedy he loved best, *Zaïre.*

Falkener was a man of good education, interested in art and literature, with a knowledge of ancient languages and a hobby for collecting antiques. In the dedication of his *Zaïre* Voltaire calls him his "fellow-countryman in literature." In a letter to Voltaire Falkener wrote: "I live here just as when you left me, neither merrier nor sadder, neither richer nor poorer; I am enjoying excellent health as well as everything that makes life comfortable; I am not in love, I covet nothing, I aspire to nobody's position and I envy nobody: and as long as this keeps up I shall surely call myself a truly happy man."

Falkener, after having been Ambassador at Constantinople, became private secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, the King's second son. He followed the Duke to war and was present at the defeat at Fon-

tenoy; in 1746 he accompanied him to Scotland, where the battle of Culloden suppressed the rebellion. Later he became postmaster-general and held this position until his death.

6

The *Daily Journal* of January 27, 1727, contained the following note:

"Last week the Sieur de Voltaire, the famous French poet in exile, was presented to His Majesty, who received him with favor. It is said that the French government dropped him a hint that it would be unwise to publish his poem *La Ligue*. It has been prosecuted in court by the Cardinal de Bissy because of its eulogies of Queen Marie's attitude in religious matters, and its numerous thrusts at the abuse of the Pope's power and the corruption of the confessional."

Voltaire was presented at the Court of St. James' to the man whom nine years previously he had called a Hero, whose subjects he had likened to Melpomene's sons. He saw the King five months before his death. But he did not lose by his death, as he had been warmly recommended to King George II and Queen Caroline, who were crowned in June, 1727.

Among those close to the Queen, when she was still Princess of Wales, was a very unassuming lady, Henrietta Howard, later Countess of Suffolk. The former Madame de Villette, now Lady Bolingbroke, wrote to her in her most flattering French (with abominable spelling, without accents or apostrophies, with two words instead of one) an unqualified recommendation for Voltaire, meant for the Princess of Wales: "No one has a finer understanding or a fuller appreciation of a great and deserving intellect than yourself. Please grant your protection to this, the sole French poet we now possess, and be so kind as to deliver to Her Royal Highness the enclosed copy of his recent tragedy, which he has taken the liberty of inscribing for her."

Voltaire had yet another protectress at the new Court in the person of another favorite of the royal pair, Mrs. Clayton, afterward Lady Sundon. He never

forgot his indebtedness. From France he later wrote to her: "I wish, for the honor of Versailles, for the progress of virtue and of literature, that we might have here a few ladies like you. You see that my wishes are infinite. But infinite, too, is the respect and gratitude with which I, Madame, call myself your devoted and obedient servant." The irritable little tyrant George II never accustomed the ladies of his Court to such courtesy.

Queen Caroline's friend, Lord Hervey, was also a friend of Voltaire: he had visited the poet in Paris. This pleasant man traveled and wrote poetry, a sample of which is found translated in Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*. Hervey had an attractive wife, who before her marriage had been the inspiration of many, as the incomparable Molly Lepell. Several verses, which Voltaire addressed to her in his best English, reveal that she made a serious impression upon him. She is probably the only Englishwoman of whom this can be said. The verses read:

Hervey, would you know the passion
You have kindled in my breast?
Trifling is the inclination
That by words can be express'd.
In my silence see the lover;
True love is by silence known,
In my eyes you'll best discover
All the power of your own.

This means well; but Voltaire's French verses are preferable.

7

Not long after his arrival Voltaire started to pay his visits to the writers and scholars of England.

Among the dramatists he called on was Congreve whom he greatly admired and spoke of as England's Molière. He found him weak and ill, not far from death. Voltaire was disappointed that Congreve spoke contemptuously of his own writings, wished to be thought of only as a gentleman, and regarded his literary activity as dilettantism. Voltaire has only to criticize in Congreve's plays: that they are too few.

He says they "are all excellent and follow strictly the rules of the theater." What Voltaire likes especially is that the villains express themselves in a decently intelligible manner.

England's second dramatist, William Wycherley, Voltaire could not visit. He was dead. But Voltaire paid him great respect and found that *The Country Wife,* though not a school for good manners, was an education in wit and good comic effects. He even went so far as to declare *The Plain Dealer* the wittiest of all plays ancient or modern. This play was based on Wycherley's impression of Molière's *Le Misanthrope,* and as a poetic work it is far behind Molière. On the stage, however, it has more vitality and Voltaire elaborated it in his own play *La Prude* (1740). *La Prude* is a painstaking work, but its satire was so sharp that it could not be performed publicly. It was played only once (1727) in a private performance at the castle of the Duchess de Maine, in Sceaux, where Voltaire recited the rhymed prologue.

Samuel Johnson, though still a youngster at the time of Voltaire's stay in London, published a collection of spiteful and untrue anecdotes about him, and persecuted Voltaire with inexhaustible bitterness.

Voltaire's first visit to Pope was a failure, but later the two met at the home of Bolingbroke and in Twickenham, at the home of Bubb Dodington.

There were not a few similarities between Pope and Voltaire. Both were physically weak. But, while Pope's physical frailty was the almost helpless infirmity of a hunchback, Voltaire's weakness was something Herculean. In his letters he insists on his broken-down health. In spite of it all he lived to eighty-three.

There was a certain resemblance in the poetry of the two; they wrote a didactic and at the same time satiric verse that is extinct in the present day. Voltaire had a passionate admiration for the poetry of Pope as well as for that of Gay. What he admired in Pope was the influence of Boileau. Voltaire preferred Pope's *Essay on Criticism* to Boileau's *L'art Poétique,* and Pope's *Rape of the Lock* to Boileau's *Le Lutrin.*

Pope and he had exchanged compliments before they were able to converse together. Bolingbroke had sent a copy of *La Ligue* to Pope, who replied with warm praise of what he understood of it—certainly not a great deal. Voltaire sent Pope his expression of deep sympathy, when he heard Pope had cut his hand in a fall from his coach, the hand that had written so magnificently of the stolen lock of hair, of criticism, which had put Homer in English dress.

As early as October, 1726, Voltaire wrote to a friend in Paris:

"Never have I met such a pleasing imagination, such bewitching charm, such variety, so much quickness and so cultured a knowledge of the world combined, as in this little figure."

As late as the year 1756 he confesses to Thiriot: "I surely do not write as good verses as Pope."

Sir John Denham, in his poem on Coopers-Hill, apostrophized the river Thames in this wise:

> O could I flow like Thee, and make thy Stream
> My great Example, as it is my Theme;
> Though deep, yet clear; though gentle yet not dull;
> Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

Voltaire applied these lines to Pope's poetry, addressing him thus:

> Que votre poésie, et forte et naturelle,
> Ne soit de la Tamise une image fidèle;
> Soyez profond, mais clair; soyez doux, sans lenteur;
> Plein, sans vous déborder; rapide, sans fureur.

Voltaire found Pope's crystal poem the *Essay on Man* of great poetic value, though later, as his optimism wore off, he saw in it false ideas of a happy life.

After the earthquake in Lisbon he recognized that Pope had done nothing more than restate Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* and Leibnitz' *Théodicée*. The optimism began to anger him. He wrote that Universal Love was the name given the instinct of animals to eat each other. He aimed *Candide* as much against Pope as against Leibnitz.

Somewhere he says: "Those who go about preaching the rightness of things-as-they-are are charlatans.

Shaftesbury, who brought this nonsense into fashion was himself a very unfortunate man. I saw Bolingbroke a victim of grief and fury, I found even Pope, whom Shaftesbury inspired to put this silly lie into verse, more pitiful than anyone I know, physically malformed, spiritually exhausted, constantly ill, always a burden to himself, and hounded until his last hour by a hundred enemies." And elsewhere: "My poor Pope, my poor hunchback, who told you that God could not have created you without a hump! . . . As for myself, I suffer, and I confess it."

Later Voltaire induced Madame du Châtelet to correspond with Pope, and she writes: "He always speaks of you with infinite respect."

A far deeper impression was made on Voltaire by Jonathan Swift who, in April, 1727, arrived from Ireland for a half-year's sojourn in England. Voltaire met him at Dawley and at Twickenham and spent three months with him in Petersborough. If Voltaire's *Discours en Vers sur l'Homme,* which began to come out in 1734, forms a parallel to Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733), there is no doubt that Voltaire's *Micromégas* would never have been written, had not Swift published *Gulliver's Travels* the year Voltaire came to England. Except for the end, which he disliked, Voltaire admired this work tremendously.

Swift was as much influenced by French literature as Voltaire by English. He took the idea of his first famous satire *Tale of a Tub* (1704) from Fontenelle's *History of Mero and Enegu* (which means: of Rome and Geneva), which in the same way makes fun of the differences of the various Christian faiths. Swift was also influenced by Boccaccio's tale of the three rings, which Lessing long afterward elaborated in his *Nathan der Weise.*

As can be seen, in the later part of his life Voltaire stood nearer Swift's pessimism than Pope's optimism. But during his stay in England he was more disposed to Pope's view in spite of the depression to which at times he was subject.

All the passionate refutation of Pascal which was to conclude the *Lettres philosophiques* and which according to Voltaire himself was written in Wands-

worth, is a fight against misanthropy. It was written with the premise than man is neither so bad nor so unhappy as Pascal makes him out.

Voltaire says that Falkener's letter reached him as he was about to begin his refutation of Pascal. He particularly states that the letter came from a friend in a foreign country. Hence this must have been written in France. No matter when the letter was written, in 1728 or in 1729, its tone is distinctly optimistic: "You wonder why God has made man so wretched. Why not wonder instead that he hasn't made him still more limited, still more ignorant, and still more wretched?"—And strangely enough this passage is almost word for word the same as one in Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733):

> Presumptuous man! the reason wouldst thou find,
> Why formed so weak, so little and so blind?
> First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess.
> Why form'd no weaker, blinder and no less?

Both poets speak of life in general. But usually Voltaire devotes himself to comparisons between England and France. During his extensive contacts with England's great men and with English middle class families he continued to think of the English as behind the French in moral *finesse*—this in spite of his enthusiasm for the British national virtues. England was great in the art of thinking, France in that of pleasing.

And though he associated with England's wealthy class, he found their way of life comparatively frugal. He believes that "in Parisian middle-class homes there is five hundred times as much silverware as in those of London." The dwellings in Paris were better, the furniture better, the service better, the food better. There are thirty different religions in England, but only one kind of sauce. More poultry and game are consumed in Paris in one evening than in a week in England. Paris burns a thousand times as many wax candles. For, except at Court or in Court circles in England, only tallow candles are used.

On the whole, he finds the English cruder and rougher than the French. They do not understand fine

speech; nor are they interested in good, soft music. As they drink mixed drinks and eat over seasoned food, they crave drums and trumpets. And he summarizes his opinion in the oft-repeated comparison of the English people and English beer: on top foam, at the bottom yeast; and what is in the middle is excellent.

8

The greatest of all Englishmen Voltaire was not able to see. Isaac Newton was soon to die. He died on March 20, 1727, eighty-five years old. With astonishment and enthusiasm Voltaire, who had been beaten by ducal lackeys and exiled to England, watched Newton's coffin carried to Westminster Abbey, followed by dukes and earls.

He saw science honored by men whose position and wealth were princely. He saw clearly that Roman Catholicism in France was not only arresting the development of literature, but choking civilization and that Protestantism could not be professed even by the very great. He understood what it meant that this England, which had decapitated one king and deposed another, had overthrown the ecclesiastical power and permitted full freedom to thought, speech, and literature.

He, who in France had dreamed in vain of a diplomatic career, was astounded to see how England honored her scientists and men of letters. Newton as well as Locke had been rewarded with profitable government posts. Addison had been a secretary of state and was buried in Westminster Abbey; Prior and Gay held important positions as ambassadors. Voltaire, by paying his respects at Versailles, had received a few thousand francs in pensions, which he now had lost, whereas in England minor figures like Hughes, Rowe, Ambrose Philips and Congreve had profitable sinecures.

He saw that art was as highly esteemed as science, even that art which French prejudice despised, the art of acting. The greatest dramatic artist France ever

had, Molière, had been excluded from the French Academy, and had to be buried at night. Even this would have been denied him except that his widow had the good sense to scatter the Parisian mob by throwing a large sum of money in its midst.

Newton was buried March, 1727. Three years later the famous actress Anne Oldfield was buried, also in Westminster Abbey, and with almost as much ceremony and honor as Newton.

England observed a national memorial day for Shakespeare; France had none for Molière.

The difference that struck Voltaire most forcibly, however, was this: He had left a country where the gag was the government's constant and most effective tool, and he had come to a country where the gag was not known. Here every writer, from Swift down, could attack the policy of the ministry with a satiric ferociousness that in France would have sent him to jail for life. Here nothing was done to him. The strange thing was that this freedom of speech could be reconciled with order and quiet.

Apparently his countrymen did not desire liberty. They held fast to every antiquated system and thus hindered as much as possible the growth of new ideas. Aristotle's doctrine persisted in France longer than in any other country. Descartes, who attempted to think without prejudice and without preconceived ideas, was forced to live for twenty years in Holland; even so, his philosophy was denounced and forbidden in Italy in 1643, in Holland in 1656. As late as 1693, when England had advanced so far beyond Descartes that Newton's principles were freely developed at Oxford, at Cambridge and in London, the Cartesian teachings were regarded in France as so dangerous to the Commonwealth, that the Royal Council prohibited them in the Sorbonne. When the Cartesian physics finally took root in France (after the clergy discovered that its laws were "spiritualistic"), they became the sacred dogma, and the gag was tied on in their favor.

Voltaire was soon made to feel this when he tried to publish, in France, what he had learned in England from Newton and Locke. The censor wouldn't

pass what he had written until he altered Locke so much that the doctrine was completely obscured. Truth had to be smuggled into France like a dangerous outlaw; in England it was free-born and openly acknowledged.

France was the incubator of metaphysical systems. In England metaphysical speculation was abandoned in favor of progress on the basis of experience. The French tried a short-cut to the origin of the universe and of the intellect and endeavored to derive the entire nature of life from first principles. The English scientists never began with abstract ideas, but with accurately observed phenomena from which moderately and carefully they would progress to the unknown principles and try to recognize them if possible by logical deduction.

Of course, England, too, had noted metaphysicists. There were some among Newton's pupils. England had at least one who has a place in history: Berkeley (later Bishop) who denied the reality of the material world. Voltaire met Berkeley; the circumstances of the meeting, however, are not known. Voltaire seems to have had a favorable impression, for he calls him one "whose desire to work for the best of mankind has grown into a passion."

Nevertheless, a letter Voltaire wrote to his Quaker friend, Andrew Pitt, proves that he did not accept the arguments of Berkeley's *Alciphron,* published shortly after Voltaire left England. He acknowledged its ingenuity, but could not be persuaded by it.

Berkeley repelled him as Descartes had.

Although Descartes set out analytically and critically, he soon lost himself in speculation unsupported by fact. Newton's method on the other hand, had been to confine himself at the beginning to the earth, and to apply what he observed to the universe outside of the earth. Then he investigated whether the conclusions would square with observations. Why should gravity not exist on the other planets as well? Why should the motion of the moon not be taken for a falling motion? And could it not be gravity that kept the moon in its orbit? Wasn't it even possible that all matter exercised a similar attraction, that it was

gravity that conducted the movements of the heavenly bodies and kept together the universe?

In Locke, it was the new presentation of the problem of perception which captivated Voltaire. That ideas are not inborn, but derive from external or internal experiences and are the transformation of sensory impressions or of reflexes, was a doctrine which appealed to him by its apparent simplicity and clearness. He remained its exponent all his life. That Locke's doctrine contains a contradiction in assuming the passivity of the mind at the reception of the impulse and yet postulating its activity at the derivation of the idea does not seem to have impressed Voltaire. In spite of his skepticism with regard to inborn ideas, he continued to maintain the irrevocability of not a few fundamental ideas which, he insisted, were accepted by all people and all nations.

Thus it was that he accepted without question Locke's proof of the existence of God: the world must have a first cause. A truth of which we are persuaded intuitively, leads from the world to the Creator, just as we deduce the watchmaker from the watch. What does not really exist, cannot create reality. The introduction of God into his speculation helps Voltaire as well as Locke over various philosophical difficulties. If one asks whence comes the ability of the mind itself to perceive the truth, the answer is that God could have given this characteristic to matter.

The really overwhelming scientific lesson Voltaire took back with him from England, however, was taught him by Newton's discoveries. As early as 1726 Voltaire met Doctor Samuel Clarke, one of Newton's ablest disciples, who listened patiently to the questions of the intelligent Frenchman and taught him the new doctrines.

Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) was about twenty years older than Voltaire but with the same versatile gifts and the same highly critical inquisitiveness. He was one of the first to understand Sir Isaac's "sublime discoveries"—as he called them—and was one of the most active in the dissemination of Newton's philosophy. First attracted by mathematics, he later studied

Hebrew and became a clergyman. Queen Anne appointed him her personal chaplain and made him prebendary of St. James, Westminster. His clerical career, however, was rudely interrupted when, in 1714, his book *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* was charged with heresy. As a freethinker he could not remain a priest. After Newton's death he was offered his office of Master of the Mint but he refused.

Clarke seems to have been a pleasant, honest and moderate man, who viewed life and religion with the eyes of a strict Newtonian. He gave Voltaire his views, and Voltaire's belief in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* was at an end, but not his respect and admiration for Descartes. In the fourteenth epistle of his *Lettres philosophiques* he speaks of him with all esteem. Naturally, he does not compare Descartes' importance in the intellectual growth of mankind with that of Newton.

From Newton's niece, Mrs. Conduit, and her husband, he heard various vivid features and anecdotes of the life of the great man.

For instance, Mrs. Conduit related that Newton at the age of twenty had begun to read Descartes, and beside each passage which seemed to him incorrect had written the word "error" in the margin. Finally he had to fill the margins of the pages so full of "error" that he threw the book away disgusted.

Mrs. Conduit told Voltaire another anecdote, which in the form given by Voltaire is repeated in every modern biography of the great scholar: the one of the falling apple, which inspired him with the idea of the law of gravitation as a principle of the universe.

9

Voltaire was almost as deeply impressed by the differences between France and England in social and political conditions as he was by the progress of philosophy and science in England. That the British could devote particular attention to these conditions was, as he recognized, mainly due to the fact that they wasted no time in metaphysical debates.

The farmer in France was a beast of burden, liable to taxation at the whim of others. At that time La Bruyère's famous description (*Les Caractères*, Chapter XI) of the hardships he had to endure still held true:

"It is always a shock to me to witness man's inhumanity to man. One sees human animals, male and female, distributed over the country, black and sunburned, bound to the soil, in which they dig and toil with unconquerable stubbornness. If they straighten up they show human features and are people. At night they retire into their caves, where they live on black bread, water and roots. They save others the trouble of sowing, plowing and harvesting, and hence they should not be in desperate want of the bread which they have sowed.

"The provincial aristocrat, of no use to his country, to his family or to himself, who often has not even a roof above his head, nor decent clothing nor any virtues, nevertheless repeats ten times a day that he is noble, mocks at the President of the Parliament as bourgeois and is forever fussing with his documents and titles which he wouldn't exchange for the position of chancellor."

In England he captured that impression of quiet luxury he received earlier in Holland. Here there were no poll taxes specially for the farmer. Clergy and nobility were not exempt. The farmer did not wear wooden shoes, he ate white bread, was decently clothed and did not risk crushing taxation, if he enlarged his farm or covered his roof with tiles. Voltaire found a large number of country gentlemen with a yearly income of five or six hundred pounds, who didn't find it below their dignity to till their own land and who never thought, as did every Frenchman, as soon as he owned a bit of land, of moving from the country to the city.

He discovered that the nobility in this country formed no closed caste, but the great merchant whose trade was of advantage to England and the whole world, was awarded a title, while nobility's younger sons were trained in middle-class activities.

So it seems plain that the exile which was pro-

nounced as punishment, actually afforded the young writer a wealth of knowledge and understanding which he probably would never have reached without it.

His mortifying beating by the lackeys of a nobleman became of advantage to him in still another way. He, whose entire social intercourse in France was with men and women who had all the privileges, would never without exile have become conscious of the wrongs to which they were exposed who did not belong by birth to the nobility. Having been educated with aristocrats, the respect they showed his talent in daily association, the homage they paid his genius in daily life, had for many years blinded him to the insolence and prejudice that underlay their pretense of recognizing his equality. Only when the smooth surface, on which he had glided with confidence, cracked and let him plunge into the cold water beneath, did he recognize the real structure of French society.

10

Burke has drawn attention to the fact that during the two generations that came between Louis XIV's death and the outbreak of the Revolution there was scarcely one prominent Frenchman who had not either visited England or learned English. Among the other notables who crossed the Channel and were introduced into English society were: Buffon, Helvétius, Lafayette, Montesquieu, Maupertuis, Rousseau, Roland and Madame Roland.

None of these except Voltaire took the trouble to seek and master the learning of England.

His later works prove that he continued the study of English literature after his return to French soil. The fourth act of *Mahomet* (performed for the first time in 1742) was influenced by George Lillo's drama *George Barwell or the Merchant of London* (1731); the well-known twentieth chapter of *Zadig,* by *The Hermit,* a work of the unimportant English poet, Thomas Parnell, a fact over which Fréron made a great to-do.

Strangely enough Voltaire seems to have overlooked Daniel Defoe's masterpiece *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared in the year 1719. At any rate he has, as far as I know, never mentioned either the author or the character.

On the other hand, he read an older, very difficult and abstruse English poet, and esteemed him highly: Samuel Butler, the author of the mock-heroic poem *Hudibrae*, and a contemporary of Milton. *Hudibrae*, which deals with the civil war at the time of Cromwell, is as detailed as it is witty. Voltaire took four hundred lines from this work and condensed them to about eighty, very clever and amusing. Among his comments on this work, there is one that proves how high his critical genius could place him as a judge of art. He compares *Hudibrae* with the French *Satire Ménippée* as well as with the Spanish *Don Quixote*. "*Hudibrae* has the advantage over both of the others, of being written in verse; it also has the further advantage, of being written with wit. The *Satire Ménippée* does not even approach it. But thanks to this same wit, the author of *Hudibrae* has made his work far inferior to *Don Quixote*. Taste, simplicity, the art of inventing and narrating delightful adventures with gusto, the art of being sparing with dry argument, is far more valuable than any wit. That is why *Don Quixote* is read by all nations, and *Hudibrae* by the English only."

Voltaire read Shakespeare, and foreign as Shakespeare's style and technique were to all the ideas of dramatic poetry with which Voltaire had grown up and from which he could free himself only to a limited extent, he was amazed at the magnificence of this genius. He resolved to impart to his countrymen the riches of this mine.

He recognized Milton sufficiently to state, in his essay on epic poetry, that Milton had contributed as much to England's honor as Newton. At the time of his arrival in England, Milton's daughter was still living; although he found no occasion to be introduced to her, he met many who had known her very well and heard from them all there was of first-hand tradition about the great poet.

In his English *Essay on Epic Poetry* Voltaire says that Milton got his idea of *Paradise Lost* from an Italian comedy, *Adamo,* written by an actor, Andreino, which in his youth he had seen in Florence. This statement was declared by critics, as politely as possible, to be absurd. Voltaire answered that he had the authority of friends of Deborah Milton not only for this, but also for the fact that Milton originally conceived the idea, not as an epic, but as a tragedy, of which he wrote one and one-half acts.

One day when Voltaire was dining with Dodington, in spite of all due respect to Milton, he called the episode on Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* boring and repulsive; whereupon the poet Young, comparing Voltaire's own lean face with the face of Milton's *Death,* improvised the following lines:

> You are so witty, profligate and thin,
> At once we think thee Milton, Death and Sin.

It is certain that Voltaire's admiration for Milton did not extend to his allegories. Nevertheless, his admiration was deep and warm. He says that Milton got from the Italian comedy inspiration for the "noblest work ever created by human imagination." And even the comedy was witnessed twenty years before he began *Paradise Lost.* While in educated French circles jokes were made about the serpent, the devil, Adam's rib, and the bite of the apple, Milton's imagination had been able to draw from this material treasures of which nobody had dreamed. Milton described the history of creation without bombast, told of female curiosity interestingly, brought probability and reasonableness into supernatural occurrences. The fundamentally sterile theme became a thing of awe under Milton's pen. Voltaire admires the conversation between Adam and the angel, the keen delineation of Satan's spiteful, invincible, and crafty character; also the sureness Milton shows in the part where he dares to describe God himself and lets him speak. God, says Voltaire, has been pictured as an almighty tyrant: always by the pagans, often by Jews and not seldom by Christians.

Milton's God, on the other hand, is a creator, a father, and a judge.

What Voltaire remarks on particularly is the purely human content of the poem. Here, love between man and woman is not, as in other religious works, accounted a vice, but a virtue. The characters are naked but honorable. With chaste hand the poet removes the veil which usually conceals the joys of love. Here we have tenderness and warmth without frivolity. The poet has imagined himself in the state of innocence in which Adam and Eve lived for a short time.

Voltaire complains that the Duke of Buckingham, in his *Art of Poetry,* preferred Spenser to Milton, and that Dryden compared him sometimes with the greatest poets of antiquity, Homer and Virgil, then again with the worst French poets, such as Chapelain and Lemoine. He is glad of the justice which Addison, "the best critic and greatest writer of his time," accords Milton.

Voltaire did not wish to withhold his praise or his criticism. Yet he did not wish to offend the English in their national pride. He therefore selected the device of emphasizing the difference of national tastes in England and France, and picturing what a French critic would have to say against *Paradise Lost.*

Such a critic would object to those passages in which the poet speaks in his own name, now about himself and about his blindness, now about his theme and its superiority to that of the *Iliad.* Voltaire, however, for his part, finds in such a comparison a very excusable human weakness. On the other hand he strongly emphasizes how shocking an idea like the summoning of a devil's parliament, this pandemonium, would be to the cultured Frenchman. He disapproves of this Hall of Parliament with its Doric columns and its gilded vaulting. Death, Sin and Chaos, leave him cold. And he formulates a doctrine as to what allegories should be: short, unconstrained, and noble. Apparently he is of the opinion that his own allegories in the *Henriade* achieve this perfection. It seems to him a clever conceit to have Sin posted at the doorway to Hell, able to open the gates

but unable to close them again; for, this is clear allegory. On the other hand, it seems to him absurd to have Satan and Death engage in combat, and prepare to wrestle. Against the rational aspect of the poem he had no objections; but the picture ought to be perfectly clear.

Addison admired the war in Milton's *Paradise*. Voltaire (rightly) cannot share this admiration. It should be allowed several pages at most, but never two books. To French readers it sounds rather odd when the angels bombard their enemies with mountains, complete with forests and rivers. Voltaire disapproves of the heavenly artillery, and he has a perfect right to. What purpose do these cannons serve? They cannot hurt their invulnerable and immortal targets. They can only remove the demons from their position. It's like a game of nine-pins.

As can be seen, this criticism, written originally in English for Englishmen, is kind and gentle. In later years, Voltaire gradually became less admiring of Milton. Fundamentally, Milton's subject repelled him, and when George Gray, in 1770, turned out a parody on Milton and sent it to Ferney, Voltaire answered that he always thought the story was well suited to humorous elaboration. In his verses on the epic poets, Milton does not fare so well. After mentioning Homer, Virgil, and Tasso, Voltaire says:

> Milton, plus sublime qu'eux tous,
> A des beautés moins agréables;
> Il semble chanter pour les fous,
> Pour les anges et pour les diables.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of *Candide* he lets Pococurante ridicule Milton and call him a barbarian who wrote a ten-book commentary on the first chapter of Genesis. While Moses describes the Almighty as creating the earth by his word, in Milton's work He takes a big compass from a cupboard in Heaven to draw up a ground-plan. The marriage of Sin and Death is horrible. Candide is sad over this criticism: "He thinks something of Milton." But obviously not too much; and Voltaire with him.

As was to be expected of a Frenchman educated in

the classical tradition, Voltaire from the beginning gave great importance to Addison. He calls him the first Englishman to write a logical play, and one whose style is elegant, through and through. Addison's *Cato* is recognized by Voltaire as a masterpiece of diction and metrical nicety. He even goes so far as to call *Cato* the grandest figure that ever trod any stage. On the other hand, he regrets that the other characters of the play are unimportant; also that the coldness of the love intrigue spoils the effect of the tragedy. The highest praise from Voltaire's lips, however, is that he finds Addison comparable to Racine in infallible elegance.

11

The superiority of Shakespeare's imagination seems to have impressed him more than Addison's reasoning. It inspired him and awakened an urge for imitation. If it did not appeal to him unconditionally, this was due to the fact that the prejudices of his country and age made him look down upon Shakespeare as at one who ignored the rules of unity of time and place, who did not hesitate to mix the burlesque with the solemn. This was "bad taste," and automatically excluded him from the ranks of the great.

In the *Letters on England* which he prepared during his stay there and later elaborated, he says of Shakespeare:

"The English, like the Spaniards, had a theater when the French had nothing but a hovel. Shakespeare, who is called England's Corneille, blossomed at about the time of Lope de Vega. He created the theater. He had a strong, terrible, natural and inspired genius, without either the slightest notion of good taste or the least knowledge of the dramatic conventions. . . . The virtues of this poet have been the ruin of the English theater. There are such splendid scenes, such magnificent and such terrifying passages in his monstrous farces called tragedies, that these plays are always performed with great

success. The original and titanic ideas of this poet are still sublime after two centuries. Nearly all modern writers have copied them. . . . Nobody considers that he should not be imitated, and the misfortune of his imitators is that their model is regarded as incomparable.

"In the very moving play *Othello* a man chokes his wife to death on the stage—and after being strangled, the poor girl exclaims that she dies innocent. In *Hamlet* the grave-diggers dig a grave, and at this grisly labor they drink, sing songs, and joke about a skull they uncover, as people of their sort actually do."

Voltaire, as a sample of the best in Shakespeare, translates the soliloquy *To be or not to be.* He turns it into a rhymed verse.

The reader of today who is inclined to see in this criticism a proof of Voltaire's personal, or at least French, lack of taste, should, to be just, consider that this was not only the French, but also the English conception of the time. The prominent and intelligent Englishmen whom Voltaire met in London used about the same expressions and had a lower estimate of Shakespeare probably than Voltaire. Nor did the English public show better discernment.

Pope got up an edition of Shakespeare's works. Although only seven hundred and fifty copies were printed, the price had to be reduced considerably, before the edition was subscribed. As a young man, Addison wrote verses on England's greatest poets; but Shakespeare's name was not among them. Swift was so ignorant of Shakespeare that he thought the Wife of Bath from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was a Shakespearean character, and in his works Shakespeare's name is mentioned but once. When a leading English publisher commissioned Samuel Johnson to prepare an edition of the works of English poets, it was thought obvious that English poetry commenced with Cowley. Hence the *Lives of the English Poets* contains no biography of Shakespeare. Charles James Fox remarked to the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds that in his opinion Shakespeare's greatness

would have been more assured had he not written his *Hamlet.*

Five years after Voltaire's arrival in England, the English dramatist and anti-critic Charles Gildon put out his book entitled *The Laws of Poetry,* in which he called Hamlet's famous soliloquy unnecessary to the play, ridiculed the soliloquy of the Bastard Falconbridge, and summarized his criticism in the words: "In the entire works of Shakespeare there is not one monologue for which there is any natural or reasonable excuse."

From Voltaire's *Discours sur la Tragédie* (the dedication of *Brutus*) it can be seen that in Bolingbroke's opinion there was no such thing as a good English tragedy. Th. Rymer, in *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693), says disapprovingly: "With Shakespeare one cannot speak of rules or of anything regular." Other contemporaries held the same opinion. Rowe wrote: "He lived, guided only by a sort of a natural light, and entirely unfamiliar with any rules of art." Dennis says: "In Shakespeare's works one finds faulty poetic art and an absolute ignorance of its rules." Pope remarked that it had to be admitted that, critically regarded, Shakespeare was just as repulsive at some times as he was inspired at others; he offers the most liberal selection of illustrations of both the good and the bad.

The eighteenth century in all countries believed thoroughly in rule, and was completely persuaded of the infallibility of its own taste, to which it universally gave the name of "good taste."

12

Lanson has compiled from two newspapers of the time, the *Daily Post* and the *Daily Journal,* a list of the plays given at three English theaters, Drury Lane, Lincoln's Inn Field and Haymarket, which Voltaire had occasion to attend during his stay in England. Of Shakespeare's dramas he could, in 1726, have seen *Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Henry IV, First Part, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Richard III,*

Henry VIII, Julius Cæsar, in 1727 the same plays, and in addition *Measure for Measure, The Tempest, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV, Second Part,* and in 1728 and 1729 the same plays.

This does not tell us which plays he actually did see. If we turn to Voltaire's own writings, he seems to know only *Julius Cæsar, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Richard III.* Until 1755, he did not know *Romeo and Juliet.* This is proved by a letter to Garrick from a French dramatist who read aloud long passages of this drama to Voltaire. Voltaire at first laughed at the enthusiasm of his French visitor, then was stirred by what he heard, called it beautiful, poignant, natural —and then asked to have the play read him from the beginning to the end. After which he jestingly remarked that, had the British not taken so many French ships and had they not behaved like such pirates, he would have been nicer to the founder of the English theater. In his *Discours* to Bolingbroke, one can clearly distinguish the things in Shakespeare that at first displeased him.

He takes up *Julius Cæsar.* The vivid scene in the market place, in which Brutus and Antony clash, has a powerful effect on him. But it offends his French prejudice that artisans, carpenters and shoemakers should appear on the same stage with a Brutus and a Cassius. The portrayal of jealousy in *Othello* is vividly interesting; but it seems too horrible and ridiculous to have Desdemona strangled on the stage and then give her a speech to make afterward. In the same way, while Hamlet's soliloquies excite his admiration, he is horrified that grave-diggers are permitted to appear in a tragedy. Such grossness can only be explained by the fact that Shakespeare lived in a barbaric age when the custom of keeping court fools had accustomed eminent men to hear the comic mixed with the dignified. The noblemen of that day had not got beyond the stage of hiring "jesters" to say rude and dull things to them. The jesters returned as the English stage clowns, in disregard of the fundamental law of good scenic art which requires a strict separation of the high from the low, of the noble from the vulgar. In such an unenlightened age even

Shakespeare was unenlightened. It is sufficiently revealing that he did not even know Latin.

What he lacked, therefore, was that he did not live in a civilized age. At Addison's time he would have become the perfect poet.

In following years, Voltaire often tries to inject the French dramatic style with some of the Shakespearean vigor. Under Shakespeare's influence, he began, in 1731, to write his *La Mort de César,* which he believed was written according to "English taste." In *Zaïre* he imitated Shakespeare's *Othello* (and Racine's *Mithridate*); he employs the Ghost from *Hamlet* in his *Semiramis.* But with the passing of years and the growing enthusiasm for Shakespeare at the expense of the classical taste in England, and soon also in France, Voltaire became more and more annoyed because everybody overlooked the preposterousness of the English dramatist being a poet for the higher civilized world, which knew Aristotle's rules and demanded their observance. Like Tolstoi a century and a half later he found Shakespeare's pathos bombastic.

From about 1760—when he noticed that what he had said against Shakespeare was being used against Voltaire—he employed abuse to express his feelings. Finally he became purely nationalistic in his fundamental æsthetic concepts. He believed—as he wrote to Horace Walpole—that tragedy as well as comedy in Paris stood high above the dramatic art of ancient Athens. He considered English drama was like English pudding, something nobody could relish except the English themselves.

It pained him that the traditions of the times of Louis XIV were forgotten by the younger generation. When he said to Diderot that Shakespeare was a Gothic colossus whom nobody could seriously compare to the Apollo of the Belvedere, the younger Frenchman replied that, of course Shakespeare was only such a colossus as St. Christopher in Notre Dame; but that the greatest men could stand or walk between his legs.

Then Voltaire lost all restraint. He called Shakespeare a "drunken savage," gifted it is true, with a

talent for fantasy, but whose plays could please only in England and Canada. Such an outburst does not sound well to modern ears; but it certainly was greeted with enthusiasm by the French Academy of 1776, which was of precisely the same opinion. And if one read Voltaire's objections to the monologue of the porter in *Macbeth* (which Schiller omitted in the translation for his theater) and to the coarse epithets of *Othello* (which are omitted at modern productions) one notices that Voltaire's estimate of Shakespeare is not very different from Goethe's.

In his essay *Shakespeare als Theaterdichter* (1826) the twenty-seven-year-old Goethe has about the same opinion as the eighty-two-year-old Voltaire. He insists on the necessity of revamping *Romeo and Juliet* as well as *Macbeth* for the theater in Weimar. He defends Schröder's omission of the entire first scene from his acting version of *King Lear*, "because it shows Lear as so unreasonable that one can not blame his two bad daughters."

It was the unfortunate temper with which Voltaire, as an old man, wrote his criticism of Shakespeare, that has hurt him. What he meant would have easily been excused, had he said it in a less abusive manner.

13

Although Voltaire had the foresight, in his *Lettres Philosophiques*, not to mention the theological disputes which were rife in England at the time, they occupied a great deal of his attention. A fierce battle had broken out for and against revealed Christianity, as well as for and against deism.

He had no need to come to England to learn about free thought.

Before he was born there were freethinkers in Paris: some forgotten, as Mesnault, Méré, Debarraux, but also some who today have worldwide fame—as Molière, La Fontaine, Boileau.

As today it is suggested that the story of Christ's Passion and the teachings of Christianity were in existence long before Jesus, so Voltairianism existed

in France long before Voltaire. He took it over almost like an inheritance from more moderate predecessors.

On French soil he had prominent scientific forerunners in Pierre Bayle and in Fontenelle. Carefully and shyly, but unequivocally, the idea of tolerance was expressed in Bayle's excellent and cleverly arranged *Pensées Diverses sur la Comète.* He was quite outspoken in his *Commentaire Philosophique sur le Compelle Intrare,* his fight against the zealots who wanted to force conversions. From the *Project de Dictionnaire* Voltaire took some good passages for his *Jeannot et Collin,* and from the article *Asyndicus* in the *Dictionnaire* he got his story *Cosi Sancta.* Most probably it was from Bayle that he borrowed the idea for his *Dictionnaire Philosophique.* According to Bayle, religion annihilates all natural ideas of justice to such an extent "that one is rendered incapable of distinguishing good deeds from bad." It "seems to rob us of what little sense Nature gave us in the first place."

Bayle's attitude was that of a skeptic. His ever-ready genuflections to the Faith, his constant humble avowal of the miserable weakness of his poor reason compared to the sturdiness of the Faith, are full of irony. At times he seems to become very outspoken, as in the little Essay *Ce que c'est que la France Toute Catholique Sous le Règne de Louis le Grand.* His reason for writing this was the Revocation of the edict of Nantes. It expresses indignation over the persecution of the Protestants by the infamous dragonnades. Still more anger does it express over the hypocrisy with which this action was everywhere described as mild.

His satire does not appeal, like Voltaire's, to the great reading public. It might perhaps have taken him up, had he not been forced to become a fugitive and to write anonymously. He says that the world is bad; therefore it was part of God's immutable plan that it be unhappy as well as ridiculous. But as God acts only out of infinite wisdom, He punishes the world in the quickest and most expedient way. Were it His object to make man miserable and ridiculous,

there could be no more effective method than to keep the Roman Church in a position of the highest possible respect and power.

As we have seen, Voltaire had close relations with Fontenelle. Fontenelle's *Histoire des Oracles* brings a few home truths to the attention of his readers. The "oracles" are used as a symbol. The belief in their supernatural nature in his book correspond to Bayle's belief in the supernatural character of comets. He shows that the Christians of antiquity thought the oracles were the works of demons, and that they were wrong in simply denying their veracity. Numbers of pagan philosophers had denied the divinity of oracles: for oracles "and more than that, religions," had originated in an attempt to give an explanation for some natural phenomenon, such as the vapor rising out of a hole in the earth. The dignity of the oracles and the comfort of the priests both required that the utterances come from caves. Reflected from a vault, the voice sounded bigger, more terrifying.

In the *Préface de l'Histoire de l'Academie des Sciences,* Fontenelle had outlined the experimental method, and ever since 1721 Voltaire kept in touch with him. At that period Fontenelle's support of the Cartesian "vortex" doctrine struck him as absolutely impossible, maddening.

The *Lettres Philosophiques,* which gave Voltaire's impressions of his stay in England, are supposedly letters he wrote to Thiriot from London in 1734. It is characteristic that he carefully omitted all mention of the theologic-philosophical quarrels in English literature and the press. It was not until 1767 that he discussed English freethinkers in his *Lettre sur les Auteurs Anglais.*

The introduction to one of his earliest works contains a few references to British piety, but it is only the sect of the Quakers that he mentions with interest and respect. He had made the acquaintance of an English Quaker, Andrew Pitt, who for thirty years had been a linen draper and then had retired from business and settled in a comfortable house on the outskirts of London. In spite of his advanced age

when Voltaire met him, he was vigorous and healthy, because he had never indulged in passions or dissipation. He had never been ill. When he died in 1736, an English newspaper said of him that he had many virtues and not a single vice. He was one of the preachers and controversialists of the sect, and was somewhat indignant at the vein in which Voltaire wrote about the Quakers; but from 1728 was in friendly correspondence with him.

From him Voltaire received a strong impression of true piety and firm character and the same contempt for all hocus-pocus that Voltaire felt so strongly.

14

As long as he lived in England he did not find time to write about the Quakers. He was especially busy with his old poetic work *La Ligue,* the first sketch of which became on English soil *La Henriade.* This sketch was considerably improved, and Voltaire showed again that he was grateful for reasonable criticism no matter whence it came.

A Greek by the name of Dadiky, who was interpreter to the King of England, chanced to read the first proof of the poem, in a printing shop. He called upon its author and told him: "I am from Homer's country. He did not start his works with ingenious and puzzling ideas."

This referred to the opening lines of the *Henriade:*

> Je chante les combats et ce roi généreux
> Qui força les Français à devenir heureux.

"Who forced the French to become happy" seemed obscure to the Greek, so these lines were replaced by the simple and dignified opening in its final and permanent form:

> Je chante ce héros qui régna sur la France
> Et par droit de conquête, et par droit de naissance,
> Qui par des longues malheurs apprit à gouverner,
> Calma les factions, sut vaincre et pardonner.

It was Voltaire's intention to publish a new edition of the composition on which he had worked so long, and add to it his completely revised dissertation on poetry.

As he tells in his *Commentaire Historique,* he found certain similarities between Henry IV and himself. At least both looked to England for help:

> Je ne dois pas être plus fortuné
> Que le héros célèbre sur ma vielle:
> Il fut proscrit, persécuté, damné
> Par les devots et leur douce séquelle:
> En Angleterre il trouva du secours,
> J'en vais chercher . . .

He got the help he sought. King George I, and the Princess of Wales, who soon afterward became Queen, gave him their patronage. The Princess had noble interests; it was she who helped Milton's daughter, as soon as she was informed of her poverty; it was she who intervened between Clarke and Leibnitz. She favored the work of the French poet, and procured for him what he called an "immense subscription." The members of the Court and all the first names of England were on the list; as far as that goes, it perhaps could have been called immense. According to our ideas, it was not especially long; there were 344 names.

Voltaire left no stone unturned in his efforts to increase the number of subscriptions. He asked Swift to use his influence in Ireland to procure some there.

In England, the Earl of Oxford supported the subscription. In Ireland the Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Carteret, a warm friend of literature did the same. The Lord-Lieutenant went so far as to permit Voltaire to open a little book shop in the Palace of the Viceroy, where his composition was distributed.

To show his gratitude for the support of the English Royal House he dedicated his work to the Queen. In the dedication he says: "It was the fate of Henry IV to be protected by Queens. He enjoyed the support of the famous Elizabeth who was the glory of her generation and an example to princes. Where can a better protector for his memory be found than she

in whom Elizabeth is reincarnated!" This sentence too occurs: "Supported by the spirit in which this poem is written, I am taking the liberty of offering it to the noble consort of the King who is almost unique in enjoying the inestimable glory of reigning over a free nation, of the King who wishes that his power consist in being loved, his praise in being just." George II sent the poet four hundred pounds and granted him admission to his private suppers. As a friend of Queen Caroline, the Queen of Prussia sent him a medallion with the portrait of the English Queen.

It was rather droll that Voltaire dedicated his composition to a Protestant Queen. A composition in which he, out of compulsory piety, is so Catholic. In France the poem was pronounced heretical because it did not say enough that was bad about the despised Protestants; in England it really cut a queer figure with its feigned Papism. But this was overlooked in admiration. According to Voltaire's statement the great sale of the work on English soil laid the foundation for his wealth. The first foundation, however, was laid long before, and it is an exaggeration when later on Voltaire writes that the French edition had cost him everything that the English had made.

The large quarto edition which appeared in England at a price of three guineas, was published by two honest booksellers in London, and was quickly sold out. Three subsequent cheaper editions were exhausted in three weeks. Voltaire's receipts were a hundred and fifty thousand francs.

Thiriot had been requested to arrange for a subscription edition in France. He had collected the money from eighty subscribers when Voltaire received a letter from him with the strange information that the entire sum had been stolen from his house while he was at Mass. Of course, the dissolute rascal Thiriot, who always was in straits, had appropriated the money.

Although Voltaire was not deceived for a moment by the pretended theft, he was too well bred and too good a friend not to accept the statement. He answered simply: "This adventure, my dear friend,

may spoil your going to Mass; but it shall not keep me from loving you always and thanking you for all the trouble you had." Many years later (December 3, 1744) he wrote to Destouches: "He has frequently offered to make good this loss; but it would have ruined him, and I should be unworthy of the name of a writer, if I would not rather forfeit one hundred louis d'ors than embarrass a friend."

The general feeling at that time was that Voltaire had given French literature what it had long lacked, and what so many other literatures possessed: a national epic. According to the ideas of the eighteenth century the *Henriade* was a work of the very first importance. However, when in 1837 the manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland* was found at Oxford, the real national epic of France was found. Taillefer sang this as he led the Norman knights to the assault at Hastings. It is simple and great and heroic.

15

The letters from England and on England which Voltaire wrote to Thiriot between the years 1727 and 1729, and elaborated up to the year 1731, were to French intellectual life of the eighteenth century much as Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* was to that of 1810. These letters revealed to the French what England was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as Madame de Staël's work described German character and intellectual life at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the prohibition of the Napoleonic police made the publishing of *De l'Allemagne* difficult. How trifling this difficulty was in comparison to those that Voltaire had to meet almost a century before, when he wished to publish his *Lettres Philosophiques!*

He did not dare to say in French what seemed to him worth saying about England's government and literature; and it did no real good to tone down the passages which were shocking in France, but in England were regarded as boringly self-evident.

When in 1733 Thiriot visited London, Voltaire

begged his friend to stay and live with him in a free country.

The letters made their first appearance in the English language under the title: *Letters Concerning the English Nation. By Mr. de Voltaire.* Thiriot contributed a preface which was revised by Voltaire. The book was a great success. Voltaire writes: "The philosophical, critical, poetic, heretical and diabolic letters have sold in London with great success. But the English are damned heretics, every one of them, willing to approve of a devil's work. I am very much afraid that the Gallic Church will not be at all enthusiastic about the book."

When the letters were published in France the following year, the clergy demanded their suppression. The doom of the book was sealed. It was condemned by the Parliament as a menace to the religious and civil order of society, and was publicly burned by the executioner.

Voltaire had done his best to cut out any improper remarks. The thirteenth letter, entitled "Sur M. Locke," which carefully describes Locke's opinion of the relation between body and mind, has been preserved to us in its original form which Voltaire later corrected. The thoughts, in the original, are much keener and clearer, the style is more vivid, the discussion is more illuminating. The original is witty and eloquent. The letter in the book is frequently dull and colorless.

Voltaire dared to mention the Anti-Trinitarians and to hint—that Newton did not believe in the Trinity. Newton had left a manuscript attacking the doctrine as contradictory to the Bible. But Voltaire avoids any discussion of the English deists, and it certainly cannot be regarded as an attack on religion when he says ironically:

"That inexplicable figure which is neither of the clergy nor of the laity, that species which in France is called 'the abbé,' is entirely unknown in England; the priests over here are all self-contained and scholarly. When the English learn that in France there are young men who are known for their excesses, who became prelates through female influence, who openly

carry on love affairs, who delight in writing amorous verses and giving elaborate suppers every evening, but who at the same time call upon the Holy Ghost and impudently style themselves successors of the Apostles—when the English learn this, they thank God for being Protestant. But of course they are nothing but wretched heretics who should be burned and sent packing to the Devil, as master François Rabelais says. That's why I don't intrude in their affairs."

No modern man would regard it as traducing religion when Voltaire says that on the London Stock Exchange, Jews, Mohammedans and Christians meet as if they had a common religion and that the only ungodliness they recognize is the filing of a claim of bankruptcy.

Apparently the book was more dangerous in a political way. It must have awakened dissatisfaction with political and social conditions in France. The French must have been ashamed, at the beginning of Louis XV's reign, to read words like these: "The English nation is the only one which has regulated the King's power by opposition, and has succeeded in attaining the reasonable form of government under which the ruler has unlimited power to do good, but finds his hands tied if he wishes to do wrong, where the lords are great without being overbearing, and have no vassals, where the people take part in the government without bringing about confusion."

Voltaire shows how this form of government originated, tells of Magna Charta, and how little liberty this granted the people, who, nevertheless, found it a great step in advance. He describes the growing importance of the House of Commons until its power exceeded that of the House of Lords.

Then follows a tribute to the British merchant marine: the respect it commands, the important part it plays in the power of the nation. Voltaire describes how Prince Eugene was able to drive Louis XIV's victorious army from Savoy because the London merchants loaned the Prince fifty million francs at a few days' notice. That is why the English merchant feels as proud as did the Roman citizen of antiquity. Voltaire says there is a constant temptation to draw a

contrast between English conditions and French as regards the contempt which any provincial nobleman had for a French merchant who, no matter how active and rich, has no social position.

The next letter recommends vaccination, states that the Circassians knew this procedure long ago, that Lady Mary Wortley-Montague introduced it in England and that Queen Caroline, when Princess of Wales, had it tried on four criminals sentenced to death, who were pardoned when the experiment proved to be harmless.

16

Voltaire introduces the various remarks he has to make on English philosophy and natural science, with a short but striking portrayal of Sir Francis Bacon. He says of Bacon: "He did not know Nature, but all the ways which led to her." And he draws attention to the astonishing passage in the *Novum Organum* in which Bacon, long before Newton, described and demanded an investigation of the attraction between the earth and heavy bodies, between the moon and the sea, and between the planets. Bacon said an experiment should be made whether a clock (one run by weights) would go faster on top of a mountain than at the bottom of a cave; for, if the pull of the weights were reduced on the mountain and increased in the cave, it is apparent that the earth has a real force of attraction.

In the letter on Descartes and Newton Voltaire tries to be just to the former and explain his nature and genius in such a way that the French national feeling should not feel too hurt by the obvious inferiority of his doctrine to Newton's. Special emphasis is laid on Descartes' service in searching out the past; his mistakes are pointed out without any belittling comments: "Even though he did not pay with good coin, it was his great merit to warn against bad coin."

Newton's discoveries are described enthusiastically. Voltaire knows that, in 1665, the great scholar put aside his calculations because, while he knew

exactly the time required for the moon to revolve around the earth, he had only Pilote's inaccurate figures for the earth's radius, so that his result was about one-seventh too small. Seventeen years later, in 1682, Newton chanced upon the degree system of measurement developed by the Frenchman Picard. This permitted him to determine the size of the earth much more accurately than heretofore and so he resumed his calculations of 1663. With the new figures for the earth's radius he saw that his calculations would check, and the sublime discovery was made. Voltaire does not fail to stress the honor Picard's measurements have brought to France, in contributing their share to make possible the greatest forward stride in the history of science.

After expounding Newton's astronomical studies, Voltaire's interest in which Maupertuis had probably awakened, he proceeds to the explanation of Newton's theory of optics as opposed to Descartes'. He shows how Newton's prisms demonstrated the truth of the theory that light is a combination of colored rays which united make white.

He does not forget to draw attention to Newton's importance as the inventor of integral and differential calculus, and recalls his contest with Leibnitz in this subject; but here he turns to Fontenelle for assistance in making the mathematics comprehensible. Finally comes a discussion of Newton's efforts to find a more accurate definition of chronology, in one part of which the great scholar points out the incorrect identification of the average length of a king's reign with the thirty years of a generation; a reign averages twenty years; and in another part he shows how it is possible to date the history of antiquity with a greater degree of exactitude by means of astronomical dates. It is true, Newton regards the expedition of the Argonauts as a historical fact, and tries seriously to ascertain how many years elapsed between it and the first Peloponnesian War. Then Newton, who had been forced to abandon his original vocation to theology, furnishes a commentary upon Revelations "in order," says Voltaire, "to console mankind for his otherwise too great superiority over them."

In the passage in which Voltaire describes how Cardinal de Polignac charged Newton with atheism, he cannot suppress a deep sigh. "Let one imagine how Newton, Locke, Clarke, Leibnitz would be persecuted in France, or imprisoned in Rome, or burned in Lisbon. What is one to think of human reason? That it was born in this century in England?"

17

To the letters on England Voltaire has added a section which is in but loose connection with the work but well within its spirit: refutations of selected thoughts of Pascal. These probably were not written at a sitting, but were jotted down at occasional and repeated perusals of Pascal in the years 1728 to 1733.

The attacks of Voltaire upon Pascal had at all times outraged the pious. An intellect of universally acknowledged greatness was impudently attacked by another intellect for which even its adorers did not claim this quality. Nevertheless, wherever Voltaire opposed his own sane and clear judgment to the paradoxes born of Pascal's dogma ridden, tortured mind, Voltaire is right. Though theologians may find depth in Pascal's contemplations, a thinker will find them merely deeply moving. Their interest does not depend upon their truth but upon their emotion.

One point, however, fascinates the attentive reader here more than even the debate between the pessimist Pascal, and the optimist Voltaire; this is the conflict into which Voltaire enters with his own opinion of twenty years later. In his advancing years he expressed himself no less pessimistically than Pascal in his *Pensées.*

The pessimism is, however, fundamentally different. Pascal's is that of a sickly, melancholy nature, which clings to a belief in revealed religion and to dogmas. Mankind for Pascal is an indefinable mystery, which cannot be understood except with the aid of the dogma of Original Sin, which is a mystery itself. Voltaire replies that the incomprehensible is

not explainable by something still more incomprehensible; and although man is a complex phenomenon, he is not a puzzle without an answer. That he is subject to change is no more curious than that a dog at times caresses, at other times bites, or that a hen at first cares for its chicks and later abandons them.

Pascal tries to make mankind afraid of itself; Voltaire tries to induce self-confidence. He queries: "Am I to despair because I cannot see God's face nor understand the mysteries of the Trinity? I might just as well despair because I have not four feet and two wings." He tries to hold a middle course between futile dissatisfaction and foolish contentment. "It is the idea of a fanatic to see man as a poor criminal awaiting execution. It is the dream of a spoiled debauchee to regard the world as a place for pleasure, a paradise. In my opinion it is sensible to believe that the earth, and the people and animals in it are what they should be according to the dictates of Providence." As can be seen, Voltaire uses here the expression "dictates of Providence" where one would expect him to use the word Nature. He is a deist, but he is careful.

Voltaire opposes his view of life to Pascal's aphorisms, in which man's continuing to struggle is explained by his inherent wretchedness and misery, which he can endure only when he does not have to think of his tortures. Voltaire maintained his opinion all through life, even when his content was supplanted by the bitterest pessimism. This is it: Man is not made for self-analysis. Anybody practicing it becomes an idiot. Man is made for action. It is as natural and inevitable for man to act as for fire to ascend, or for a stone to fall. Voltaire furnishes here a clear view of his own character.

To Pascal's melancholy preoccupation with Original Sin he opposed not only his urge to activity but also his soothing belief in Providence. Later—after the earthquake in Lisbon—when this belief in Providence was shaken, his confidence in his theories gradually disappeared. But this was not enough to induce him to go over to the doctrine he had fought so sturdily, the doctrine of Original Sin. He discarded

the belief in Providence. He never discarded his belief in action as the purpose of life.

In his study of the important questions of life, Voltaire, like Pascal, came at various times in touch with the æsthetic, in which he was as much interested as in metaphysics and theology.

Pascal sneered at the phrase "poetic beauty." He insisted that nobody knew what it meant; that nevertheless it was conventional to apply it to certain curious things, like "golden age," "fateful laurels," "glittering stars"—really an absurd jargon. One knows, he writes, the aims of geometry and medicine; but no one knows the aim of poetry. Voltaire retorted that Pascal showed very little taste to believe that any one would call expressions like those mentioned poetically beautiful; and besides that, the aims of poetry are perfectly clear.

A modern reader should pay attention to this; for it is, in a few words, Voltaire's poetic creed: "The aim of the art of poetry is to paint impressively, clearly, subtly and harmoniously. Poetry is harmonious eloquence."

One can say without exaggeration that these words are the æsthetic principle of the eighteenth century.

18

We saw how Voltaire's residence with Baron Görtz led his thoughts to a King who, scarcely twelve years older than himself, could easily fascinate the poet by his unusual virtues and shocking peculiarities. This was Charles XII.

Voltaire had never let the King out of his mind. He gathered in England most of the material for his Charles XII and made his rough notes in English. Some of these are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

As was his habit, Voltaire eagerly consulted every one who could give him useful information for his work. Bolingbroke, as former Minister of State, was of considerable help. Likewise Jeffrey, who had been English Ambassador to Charles during his long stay

in Turkey. In 1727, the Duchess of Marlborough gave him valuable information concerning details of the conversation between the Duke and Charles, in Old Ranstadt in 1707, when the allies wished to find out what rôle Sweden intended to play in the war. Voltaire mentions the Duchess as the source of his information. He tells us how in his camp at Old Ranstadt the King received deputations from nearly every sovereign of Christendom. Some asked him to relinquish his German territory, others would have liked him to turn his army against the German Empire. One rumor sprang up, that he was going to unite with France against Austria. Among the envoys was, representing Queen Anne of England, the Duke of Marlborough, who had never besieged a city without occupying it, never fought a battle without winning it. Likewise, he was the craftiest of courtiers and diplomats, one who had got the better of France as much by his cleverness as by his army. Fagel, the Secretary of the States-General, said that, every time the Dutch government resolved to resist his wishes, he came before them in person, talked French—a language which he spoke very poorly—and persuaded all of them. Voltaire says that Bolingbroke vouches for the truth of this.

Marlborough knew that Charles was angry with the Emperor of Austria and that the French had secretly tried to win him over, a serious state of affairs which might easily lead to a defeat for the allied powers. In the year 1700, it is true, Charles had given his word not to interfere in the war between the English and Louis XIV, but Marlborough did not believe that a Sovereign would feel bound if his promise conflicted with his interests. He therefore resolved to undertake the journey to sound the King on Sweden's intentions.

Voltaire writes:

"Mr. Fabrice, who was with Charles XII at that time, assured me that the Duke of Marlborough did not approach the Prime Minister Count Piper, but secretly sought out Baron Görtz whom the King had begun to trust just as much. He even arrived at the King's quarters in Görtz's coach which brought about

a certain coolness between Chancellor Piper and the Duke. When he and the English Minister Robinson were introduced he addressed the King in French and told him that he would be happy to learn under the King's banners what he lacked in the art of war. The King answered this without any compliment, apparently unaware that it was Marlborough who spoke. I happen to know that the King thought the great man's clothing too elegant, his appearance too refined for him to be a warrior. The conversation was slow, as the King spoke Swedish and Robinson had to serve as interpreter. Marlborough never made the mistake of submitting a proposal before the time was ripe, and through long practice he was expert at judging a man's mind from his look. He studied the King attentively. While speaking to him about wars in general he thought he detected a real dislike of France and a scarcely concealed delight at the operations of the allies. At the mention of the Czar, he caught a flash in the King's eyes, although the conversation was very quiet. He noticed a map of Russia on a table. That was all he needed to conclude that Charles' real intention and ambition was to seize the throne of Russia as he had annexed Poland. . . . Satisfied that he had seen through Charles XII, he made him no offer."

This Fabrice was a Swedish baron, born in Holstein, deeply indebted to Görtz, who had sent him to Charles. During the many years Charles spent in Turkey he was thoroughly in his confidence. In Bender the King had him read Racine aloud. Charles' favorite of Racine's plays was *Mithridate,* because of the bravery and tolerance of its main character. Fabrice was a brave, wide-awake spirit. In Bender it was he who warned the King, who could scarcely be convinced, that the Sultan was thinking of forcing his departure. Fabrice induced the Turks not to use force. He loaned twenty-four thousand thalers to Charles who was as careless about money as about everything else. He tried to release the Swedish prisoners in Turkey. He was with Charles in Demotica, where he says money was so scarce that he forgot whether it was round or square. And he rode beside the King's coach,

when the latter was taken to Timurtasch by the Turks.

Fabrice had been First Gentleman of the Bed Chamber to George I when the latter was Elector of Hanover, and the King retained his liking for him. He sat in George's coach on the last journey to Osnabrück, when the King died in the coach from a stroke. In 1727 he returned to England with the King's jewels and other valuables.

It is not known how Voltaire met Fabrice, whether at George II's court or through Lord Chesterfield who was his intimate friend. In the preface to his *History of Charles XII* (1748) he says that he used the memoirs of Fabrice, Villelongue, Poniatowski and Fierville; in his *Commentaire Historique* (1776) he says that he wrote his *History of Charles XII* with the help of Fabrice who—after the battle of Poltava—had lived with the King for seven years. Later Voltaire had a talk with King Stanislaw, studied *Adlerfelt's Military Journal,* and sought every bit of information he could come across.

The work was written during the years 1727 and 1728, and was complete in its main features at the time of Voltaire's return to France, in March, 1729. It was, of course, revised and expanded when it was published two years later. Voltaire also altered it whenever unfavorable criticism, mostly very trifling (that of Nordberg and La Mortrayes) made trouble which his enemies could use.

19

Voltaire's *History of Charles XII* has maintained its standing as a portrait of an unusual man, done by a master, although the accuracy of the biography has been surpassed by Swedish writers. At its publication it awakened Europe's interest in Sweden, as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* did in Denmark.

Characteristically Voltaire begins by dramatically opposing two persons: Charles XII and Peter the Great. Peter was taken up at once, for however great the author's interest in the magnificently formed

character and the remarkable fortunes of the Swedish King, his real hero is not Charles, but Peter. Not the martial and stiff-necked Peter who brought misfortune upon his country, but the Sovereign, who in spite of his brutal pleasures, in spite of the crudeness of his morals and the cruelty of his revenge, was an educator, a civilizer, the conqueror of a barbaric system of many centuries, one who introduced handicraft, arts, and science to a stubborn but talented nation.

With the clearness which is Voltaire's fundamental virtue as an historian, he begins by putting Polish society and the Polish people side by side with the Swedish and the Russian. Thus he paints in a strong background for August the Strong and Stanislaw Leszczynska, as well as for Charles XII and Peter the Great.

Voltaire did not know Swedish, but even had he known that language, it would scarcely have given him any material that would have helped him in picturing Charles XII. Was he not the pioneer biographer? It was not until 1740 that the immense folio published by Joran A. Nordberg, the King's chaplain, appeared in Stockholm. This was a collection of material on the King, assembled by a pedantic cleric. He with smug complacency criticizes his predecessors, especially, of course, the outstanding one, Voltaire, at whom, in his preface, he sneers thus: "His clever pen and his style deserve praise; but he is a prize liar."

He makes much of every petty detail which he believes to be incorrect. These inaccuracies really amount to nothing: Voltaire called one of Charles XII's servants Frederic, while this was not his real name. In speaking of the siege of Thorn, he mentions that Liesven wore a red gallooned uniform; the uniform was gallooned, but not red. He says that before the battle of Poltava the King called Count Rehnschöld into his tent for advice; actually all the generals were in that tent, not to give advice, but to take orders. He says that during a battle one of the horses that pulled the King's coach was shot, and that four grenadiers carried the King upon their lances; as a

matter of fact they were not grenadiers but guards, and they carried the King's litter not upon their lances but upon their shoulders. Now and then, Voltaire reproduced certain documents in part only, as for instance the letter which the King ordered Augustus to write to Stanislaw to congratulate him on his accession to the throne.

All these minor defects of which Nordberg complains were corrected by Voltaire, when he saw the criticism was justified. The work went into one edition after another; the last contains none of these mistakes.

Nordberg's work was soon translated and Voltaire learned the criticisms. In 1744, he replied to his opponent's accusation of lying. His letter is a little masterpiece, demonstrating the superiority of intelligence and politeness to boorish rudeness, the superiority of wit to pedantry. The letter closes with this amusing thrust:

"A historian has many obligations. Permit me to remind you of two which are of some importance: not to slander and not to bore. I can forgive you the first because your work reaches only an insignificant public. But I cannot forgive you the second since I was compelled to read your work. Otherwise I remain, as far as I can, your devoted and obedient servant."

20

Voltaire made his work a psychological study and an entertaining story. He also furnishes a description of the geographical and political background. But the inferiority of his sources, the imperfect facilities for historical research, especially into contemporary events, finally the nature of his abilities, his taste for the dramatically fascinating, are the reasons why his work is less authoritative than that of modern Swedish scholars, such as the two Carlssons.

There are various important data which he carelessly neglects at the very beginning. An instance of minor importance is Charles' ardent absolutism in refusing, in defiance of the constitution, to take the

oath upon his coronation. Of major importance is the fact that Denmark did not declare war on Sweden without provocation; in time of peace Charles had sent his troops to Holstein (then Danish territory) to support his brother-in-law, Duke Charles Frederick, against the Danish King.

Voltaire had no means of verifying his information as to dates and figures. He believed that at Narva King Charles defeated 80,000 Russians; probably the number was only 40,000. At any rate, it was glorious enough for the Swedes to be victors at the odds of one to five, if not—as was long believed—one to ten.

Just as unfamiliar is he with the details needed to make the description of a battle fascinating. Thus compared to Carlsson he gives a poor account of the battle at Kissow. It is true, in this as well as in others of his historical writings, he overlooked details. It was the great net sum of fundamental truth that fascinated him.

His style is the foundation of modern history writing. It marks the beginning of interesting and entertaining histories, as opposed to the old chronicles and dry documents. It is striking that Voltaire is never poetic, and never wants to be. Later, he makes fun of the slow-witted La Beaumelle, who attempted this style of writing. Voltaire's prose has neither color nor melody. It is clear, concise and regular. He therefore may well be considered the exponent of simple historic truth.

His *History of Charles XII* is filled with the evidence of first hand witnesses. When he speaks of the battle of Narva, Voltaire refers to information he received from Axel Sparre. Giving an account of the tragic fate of Patkul, whose extradition Charles XII demanded of Augustus the Strong, and whom he had impaled, notwithstanding his being Peter the Great's Ambassador, he makes every possible excuse for Augustus the Strong, and as his source he gives information received from the lips of Marshal Saxe, son of Augustus. On the Latin discourses at the first meeting of Charles XII and Stanislaw Leszczynska, Voltaire quotes King Stanislaw himself. He got his information about Charles' death from the King's

Adjutant, the French Siquier, who stood next the King when he fell.

The attentive reader can easily see that Voltaire had many factors to take into consideration. Most of the main characters were still alive when he wrote. Its hero, Peter the Great, had just died. It was inevitable for a close friend of Maurice of Saxony to speak respectfully of his father. On the other hand, it was impossible not to speak warmly of August's unfortunate rival, King Stanislaw, Voltaire's own protector and the father-in-law of France's King. Voltaire's description of King Stanislaw as a young man glorifies him no more than do modern sketches; these, too, emphasize Stanislaw's winning appearance, the combination of courage and gentleness in his features, the honesty and fairness of his character. Voltaire, however, is compelled to pass over the almost wretched political and monetary dependency of the Polish King upon Charles XII. Voltaire tells of Stanislaw's sudden painful retreat from Warsaw, when August unexpectedly invaded the country, while Charles was losing time besieging Lemberg. Voltaire does not forget to tell how, during the flight of the royal family to Posen, the nurse lost track of the young Princess and the King found her in a trough in a stable. It was Maria Leszczynska, who later became Queen of France.

Notable, too, is the moderation with which Voltaire describes the generals who had to yield to Charles' or Rehnschöld's superiority in inspiring the troops. Great admiration is expressed for Schulenburg's retreat, in which by crossing the Oder, he saved his army from being cut off. Schulenburg, when this was written, was still alive, and, although advanced in years, had not retired from military life. After commanding the Saxon army, he went into the Venetian service and as a Venetian general defended Corfu so courageously against the Turks that a monument, which still stands on the island, was erected to him. In 1740, he sent Voltaire, through the French ambassador, the journal of his campaign of 1703 and 1704. Voltaire answered the seventy-nine-year-old general with a very pleasant letter, in which he does

justice to Schulenburg's merits and expresses his joy that what he had written about these campaigns in his *History of Charles XII* was correct. He asks Schulenburg for further information.

As can be seen, Voltaire's *History of Charles XII* is the work of a contemporary, on the basis of the written and spoken testimony of reliable eye-witnesses. These witnesses are of various nationalities: Swedes, Poles, Germans, French, Russians, English. The first draft was written in England and was based on English sources.

It was on English soil that Voltaire became a historian.

It was on English soil that the telescope through which he observed life gave him an even longer view. England gave him the fulcrum of Archimedes outside of France, from which he could move France and the entire continent. Here he found a contrast to French conditions, which made his refined and highly cultured countrymen seem like slaves living under a religious and political yoke.

He early felt himself to be a defender of reason; he left England, a defender and knight of liberty.

Newton seemed to him the great liberator in the realm of the mind. English social, civil and literary freedom became his ideal, not, however, so far as to attract him to that side of English politics which calls for the education of the masses to understand the affairs of government and to take part in its administration. The democratic aspect of political freedom remained strange to him. But it was an ideal state of which he had scarcely dared dream in France which he found realized in England. There no one could be robbed of his freedom by arbitrary order, there no one could be punished without trial and sentence, there speech and thought were free, there all forms of religion were tolerated, there in Parliament, in literature and in the Press all views were permitted to be aired. What he said of another country, many years later, he was now saying of England:

"Liberté, liberté! ton trône est en ces lieux."

V

BATTLES AT HOME

1

In the middle of March, 1729, Voltaire, with the permission of the authorities, returned to France; but not to Paris. According to the custom of the time, a pardon was always limited, always conditional. A parole, a probation, was set. The returned exile was at first required to live a few miles outside of Paris, and Voltaire chose for his stay St. Germain en Laye. There he rented a few modest rooms at a wig-maker's. He wrote to his unfaithful Achates, Thiriot, told him of his arrival, and asked him for a meeting. Thiriot, who was living as a parasite in the home of a certain M. de Noce, did not fail to visit his famous and useful friend. As in Vienna eighty years later there was a man who had printed on his visiting cards *"ami de Beethoven,* Thiriot found his livelihood in his friendship with Voltaire. He was sought in society because he brought news of Voltaire or could read a letter or a poem from Voltaire.

Voltaire's request for the pensions formerly given him, one by the King and one by the Queen of France, was answered by the Cardinal de Fleury in a letter which was politely but definitely a refusal. Voltaire recognized that it was useless to expect a pension from the King. However, he still had some hope of changing the Queen's mind, and his friend Pallu, who was *maître des requêtes* and whom he approached, did obtain this pension for him. Five hundred francs he gave at once to his beloved Thiriot, and promised him six hundred more from the profits he expected from his *History of Charles XII.*

Now and then Voltaire stole into Paris, where he hid at the home of an old clerk of his father's. At

last Maurepas granted his request for permission to return. He no longer thought of staying with Madame de Bernières in the rue de Beaune, but rented a modern apartment in a house of rather forbidding appearance in the rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré. He sought seclusion to avoid incurring displeasure anew. He won a large sum in the Lepelletier-Desforts lottery at about this time. This turned not only the Comptroller-General but also the Minister against him, so that again he felt unsafe and for a while thought of returning to England. He resolved to disappear from Paris. With the same friend who had accompanied him on former trips to watering-places, he went to the Plombières baths, which he revisited with the same companion the following year.

In Paris he had lived not far from the Comédie Française, then situated in what is now the *rue de l'Ancienne Comédie*. His name appeared again on the bill-boards, when *Œdipe* was revived, with the admirable Adrienne Lecouvreur as Jocasta.

The tragedy *Brutus,* which was begun in England, was now finished: a good work which suffered from the weakness of having a love story worked in to help the box-office.

When Voltaire read the play to the actors they were not enthusiastic; perhaps they disliked its republican spirit. As usual, he revised the play again and again. At its première (December, 1730) the tragedy was a tremendous hit, which, however, did not mean much as the audience of the first night consisted mainly of admirers and friends of the author. Subsequently the applause and the attendance steadily decreased. The public wanted to see love on the stage, not Roman sternness, the struggles, victories, and defeats of two tender hearts, not the rude republican customs of antiquity.

The author's reputation was injured by an accusation of plagiarism made by the envious Piron. Piron contended that the play was stolen from one of the same name staged in December, 1690, forty years before, which had been written by a Mlle. Bernard with the assistance of her friend, Fontenelle. Fontenelle himself was too noble to back this charge.

Jean Baptiste Rousseau, on the other hand, took up the charge of plagiarism and called the play "A coat turned the third time, which Voltaire offers as new." First, he says, he stole Corneille's *Œdipe,* then *Marianne* from the poet Tristan, and now Mlle. Bernard's *Brutus.* Rousseau went so far as to dig up and modernize Tristan's play and have it performed simultaneously with Voltaire's *Marianne.* The public would not have it. To Rousseau Voltaire now used the expression which Molière has applied to Trissotin Vadius in the third act of the *Femmes Savantes*:

Allez, fripier d'écrits, impudent plagiaire!

Brutus had to be withdrawn after the fifteenth performance. The importation of the London edition of the *Henriade* was forbidden. Copies sent to France were seized at Calais. The few that were saved were smuggled into the country by using the sheets as wrapping paper for other books.

As to the *History of Charles XII,* 2600 copies of the first volume had just been printed, when the edition was confiscated. Charles's opponent, Augustus of Poland, was still alive. Not long after, however, it was found that a friendly attitude to Stanislaw could easily be reconciled with one to Augustus, as the former's daughter was Queen of France while the daughter of the latter was married to the Dauphin. The problem now was—to have the *Henriade* as well as the *History of Charles XII* printed secretly on French soil. For this purpose Voltaire chose Rouen where he had a protector in the person of a member of Parliament, Cideville, and where it seemed possible to find not only a discreet printer but also officials who would discreetly close an eye. Voltaire told his acquaintances that he was going to England, and secretly traveled to Rouen. There, to avoid notice he did not accept the hospitality offered by Cideville. At first he lived in a dirty, miserable little inn, L'Hôtel de Mantes, which in a letter to Cideville he describes:

Arachné tapisse mes murs,
Draps y sont courts, lits y sont durs;
Boiteuses sont les escabelles;

Et la bouteille au cou cassé
Y soutient de jaunes chandelles
Dont le bout y fut enfoncé
Par les deux mains sempiternelles
De l'hôtesse au nez rétroussé:

He moved to the house of his publisher, Jore, who soon became his bitter enemy. He posed as an English tourist, spoke a mixture of English and French, read the proofs of both books, and in the three months of voluntary imprisonment and disguise, sketched two tragedies, *Eriphyle* and *La Mort de César,* which later were printed and played.

2

The theater attracted him as much as ever; but the actress who had won not only admiration and adoration, but also respect, who had always played naturally, and not used the sing-song declamation of Racine's friend, La Champmeslé, was no more. Adrienne Lecouvreur, the enchantress, the great tragic artist, had passed away.

On March 15, 1730, she appeared at the Théâtre Français as Jocasta in Voltaire's *Œdipe,* after which she played a rôle in a lighter play, *Le Florentin.* The next day she suffered a violent attack of dysentery. Five days later, she died, after she had made her will and appointed as her executor Count Feriol d'Argental, the young man whom Voltaire always calls his "angel."

How widespread the suspicion was in Paris that she had been poisoned is proved by a frequently quoted letter of Mademoiselle Aïssé. Voltaire insisted that this was an unfounded rumor. He was present at Adrienne's last illness. She died in his arms. An autopsy revealed that she had died of an inflammation of the lower abdomen—which does not disprove the possibility that the inflammation had developed naturally. The inflammation, in Voltaire's opinion, was the result of an emetic which Adrienne had taken, and this sounds possible.

It must be admitted that Voltaire, well knowing the inclination of the public to regard every sudden death as a murder, frequently opposed in his writings the belief that historical personages had died of poison. Also, it must not be forgotten that Voltaire was in close relations with the noble house and the lady that public opinion pronounced guilty. She was the Duchess de Bouillon, not the Polish Duchess of the same name who is erroneously accused in Scribe's and Legouvé's well-known drama *Adrienne Lecouvreur,* but the sister-in-law of the Duke de Richelieu, Louise de Lorraine, who, in 1725, at the age of eighteen was married to Emanuel de La Tour, Duke de Bouillon. At various times Voltaire addressed short poems to her. In one of these occur the lines

> Deux Bouillon tour à tour ont brillé dans le monde
> Par la beauté, le caprice et l'esprit:
> Mais la première eût crevé de dépit,
> Si, par malheur, elle eût vu la seconde.

Adrienne Lecouvreur was born in 1692—she therefore was two years older than Voltaire—and had grown up among middle-class people in a little town between Soissons and Rheims. In 1702 her father, a hatter, moved to Paris and rented an apartment near the theater. The little girl grew up with a passion for the stage, a desire to recite verses, a craving for a great rôle, like Eleonora Duse at the end of the nineteenth century. At fifteen, she performed, with a few other young people who had the same taste, plays as ambitious as Corneille's *Polyeucte,* in which she played the main part, Pauline. A great lady, the wife of the president Le Jay, permitted the young people to use her salon, which was frequented by many prominent visitors. However, the police (as early as that!) prohibited these performances without a license. For a time the Grand Prior de Vendôme permitted Adrienne to stage dramatic performances in Le Temple. Afterward she was taught by the actor Le Grand, trouped with provincial companies for several years, and in 1717, entered the Comédie Française, playing the star rôles in Racine's and Corneille's plays and at once made a hit by the unaf-

fected way in which she acted. She did not recite her parts, she lived them. If the character was a Queen or a Princess, she dressed like one, looked like one, walked, spoke and felt like one. She gave the audience the full force of the great passions the character underwent. We have her portrait by Coyel in the rôle of Cornelia. In it she appears a dream of pain but beautiful as one whose goodness has developed into beauty. Everything about her was striking, figure, posture, face, and above all her voice which, though not very strong, varied continuously in inflection, intonation, modulation, or in sudden outbursts. She was not tall, but had a wonderful figure, slender but not thin. She carried her head erect, her mouth was well-formed, and her features could express sorrow, joy, tenderness, terror or pity.

She led the not too strict life of young actresses of the day. She had various casual love affairs, one with Voltaire, who to explain to Thiriot the deep sorrow he felt at her death, says—in verse—that such profound anguish is "excusable in a man who was her adorer, her friend, her lover and also a poet." She had two daughters, one by a high official of Strassburg, one by an officer of the Duke de Lorraine.

She was not flirtatious but honest, true and intelligent.

She is pathetic in two of her affairs, one, in which she was loved without returning the feeling, and in the other in which she loved with the most violent physical passion of her life and was both lover and sister.

3

The son of Augustus the Strong and Countess Aurora Königsmarck, Maurice of Saxony had, after a demobilization which dissolved his regiment, thrown himself into gambling and other excesses. Permission to go to France saved him from this worthless existence. At the French Court he was welcomed and in August, 1720, he was appointed Maréchal de Camp with an annual income of 10,000 livres. He immediately started negotiations for the purchase of a regi-

ment. He had married young, but his wife, Johanna Victoria Tugendreich, by no means lived up to her name.[1] On the contrary, she led a very free life, indulged in orgies with three trumpeters, and traveled incognita in company with a page.

It was not difficult to dissolve the marriage and this was done in March, 1721. The lady, however, continued to scheme against her former husband. In a letter written in the autumn of 1721, Aurora of Königsmarck says that the Countess had given Frau Rosenacker two poisonous powders with instructions to mix them with the coffee of Maurice.

Maurice was one of three hundred bastards sired by Augustus the Strong—the only one of this large number to make himself prominent. He had inherited the physical power of his father and some of the beauty of his mother, although his bust is not that of a strikingly handsome man. He was athletic, courageous, brutal, unrestrained, the darling of the ladies—one to whom no aim is unattainable.

Two years younger than Voltaire, he was twenty-four on his arrival in France. Ladies vied for him. Adrienne Lecouvreur at once saw in him her divine affinity. From the moment she let him possess her she no longer felt free. Maurice did not feel himself bound to any woman, much less to an actress. Besides, in spite of his prowess as a soldier, it was not on the battlefield but in the boudoir that he hoped to advance himself in the world.

The throne of the Duchy of Courland was due to be vacant soon. Duke Frederick William had governed this Polish feudal state up to his death in 1711. He left a widow, Anna Ivanovna, a niece of Peter the Great. She was later Empress of Russia. As she was childless, Courland had been governed since Frederick William's death by his uncle, Duke Ferdinand, and now that that old Duke was tottering on the edge of the grave, Courland feared for its independence if it did not elect a successor in time. Maurice of Saxony, who had aspirations to the throne, became convinced that he would be a favored candidate

[1] Translator's note: Tugendreich in German means "rich in virtue."

for the heart and hand of Anna Ivanovna. As the son of the Countess Aurora Königsmarck, who was the rightful overlord of the East Sea provinces of Sweden (at this time confiscated by Russia), he had ample excuse for visiting Courland and Petersburg Anna Ivanovna surrendered at first sight. Not only that, but her younger sister in Petersburg, the Princess Elizabeth, became her rival.

What he lacked most to achieve his ambition, was money. Aurora of Königsmarck got a loan of seven thousand thalers in Dresden on her most precious family jewels, three rare pearls. However, she was the kind of mother who wished to keep her son for herself at all costs. Far more unselfish was Adrienne Lecouvreur. It was not to her interest for her lover to succeed in Courland as Duke and husband. Nevertheless, she did not hesitate, and sent him all she could spare in cash, all she could realize by pawning her jewels: forty thousand livres.

In June, 1726, Maurice was unanimously elected Prince of Courland and heir to the throne, by the Diet of Mitau. Russia, however, would not consider for a moment an independent duchy. The Poles also feared Courland would break away from them and when Augustus realized that he could not save his crown without robbing his son he was compelled to prevent by his veto the action which would secure Maurice the right of succession in Courland. In November, 1726, the Polish Diet declared the election invalid and outlawed Maurice. When a corps of Polish dragoons advanced upon the border, Maurice, whose army numbered only about two thousand, saw himself forced to surrender Courland and, with the ducats given him by his father for traveling expenses, he returned to France.

Here he was received with open arms by the rare woman who had given him her life and kept herself for him alone.

With others she was always fearful that what was offered her as friendship would degenerate into desire. "I belong to a profession," she says in one of her letters, "in whose friendship one does not easily believe. Nevertheless, it is only friendship I wish to

know, it is the only thing that flatters me and that I believe is worthy." What she felt for Maurice of Saxony was far more than friendship. In a letter dated October 23, 1728, she writes: "A person for whom I have waited three years will arrive at last tonight, to the best of my knowledge in good health. Just now a messenger has reported that his coach is broken down thirty leagues [about eighteen miles] from here. A half-covered coach has been sent, and he will be here tonight."

Adrienne Lecouvreur, who loved Maurice of Saxony, and apparently never suspected his great abilities, was not destined to live to the time of their full fruition. Only after her death did her lover become one of the most famous generals of his century. In November, 1741, he occupied Prague by a stratagem. From August till November, 1744, as Marshal of France he defended French Flanders against the allied armies with far outnumbered forces. His skillful maneuvers rendered the overwhelming number of enemy troops ineffective. He was a great military genius, vigilant and discreet; he delayed making his plans to the last moment, then was as rapid to execute as he had been slow to formulate. He grasped every situation quickly and correctly, and always provided the solution in time. Just before the battle of Fontenoy (1745), when he lay sick in Paris, Voltaire asked him how he could think of setting out in this condition. "The idea is not to remain alive, but to advance," was his answer. And he won the decisive battle of Fontenoy, which restored France's long-lost prestige.

This famous battle exhibited chivalry in full flower. A regiment of the French Guard and the regiment of Royal Scots were the first to advance. At a distance of fifty paces the English officers greeted the French by taking off their hats. The officers of the French Guard returned the salutation. The English Commander, Lord Charles Hay, called: "Fire, gentlemen of the French Guard!" Count d'Auteroche, Lieutenant of the Grenadiers, answered in a loud voice: "We do not wish to fire first; do you fire first, gentlemen of the English Guard."

Voltaire, who—so characteristically—did not take it amiss that Maurice had supplanted him in Adrienne's affections, glorified him and ridiculed his jealous detractors in the following verses:

Ce héros que nos yeux aiment à contempler
A frappé d'un seul coup l'envie et Angleterre,
Il force l'histoire à parler,
Et les courtisans à se taire.

A thing Maurice accomplished that Adrienne Lecouvreur was to live to see, was an experiment which shows us how far ahead of his time he was in imagination and invention, even apart from military matters. In 1729 he constructed a boat which could move without oars or sails and was expected to make the run from Rouen to Paris in twenty-four hours. When the vessel proved unable to stem the current, he was the object of public ridicule. He had obtained letters of approval from two members of the Academy of Sciences and a grant of monopoly for his invention. He had bad luck at the trial run and his experiments cost him, who was anything but rich, thirty thousand livres. Adrienne Lecouvreur quoted her Molière, whose works, of course, she knew by heart: "What the devil was he doing on that galley!" As late as 1768 Voltaire himself thought this experiment simply absurd. He is content to add politely that the Marshal later redeemed his naval errors by undertaking the most complicated war maneuvers on land.

As to his genius as a commander, Frederick the Great has given unquestionable testimony. In one of his letters to Voltaire (July 25, 1749) he says: "Here I saw France's hero, that Saxon, that Turenne from the century of Louis XIV. My conversations with him were an education to me, not in French, but in the art of war. The Marshal could give lessons to any general in Europe."

4

Adrienne Lecouvreur's infatuation with Marshal Saxe was at its height when the young Count d'Ar-

gental fell passionately in love with her and begged her not to let him pine for her in vain. Free from coquetry as she was, she wrote him:

"Is it possible that a highly gifted man like yourself could have so little self-control? What do you think you can attain except embarrassing difficulties, or worse? I am ashamed of having to quarrel with you as you inspire me with so much pity; but you force me to it. Please be reasonable and ask the one whom you send to torture me to let me breathe again for a little while. During the last four days he has scarcely given me time to do so. The very next time we chance to meet I shall clearly explain to you the impropriety of your behavior, and I have not the slightest doubt that you will appreciate your injustice.

"Farewell, unhappy child! You bring me to despair."

Soon thereafter Adrienne learned that d'Argental's mother, Madame de Feriol, fearing that her son might marry Adrienne, was thinking of sending him away, as far as St. Domingo. Madame de Feriol, who led no more virtuous a life than her sister, Madame de Tencin, was as conventional as frivolous—two qualities which so often go together—and in order to quiet her Adrienne resolved to go to her and to explain her relation to the young man. Being an actress, however, she was received in a manner which made any confidence out of the question. She wrote the lady this solicitous and at the same time dignified letter:

"Paris, March 22, 1721

"Madame,

Not without great depression do I hear of your anxiety, and of the precautions to which this anxiety is driving you. I can add that I have heard with great sorrow of the criticism you have expressed of my behavior. Nevertheless I write you, less for the purpose of justifying myself, than to convince you that this behavior in so far as it concerns you will in the future be exactly as you prescribe. On Tuesday I asked to speak to you for the purpose of confiding in you, and of asking your commands. The recep-

tion accorded me upset my plans, and gave me shame and sorrow.

"It is necessary, however, that you know the true nature of my feelings—if you will permit me to say something more: it is necessary that you do not refuse to listen to my sincere warning if you do not wish to risk losing your son. He is the most respectful and most honorable man I have ever met. You would admire him if he were not your own son. Once more, Madame, condescend to coöperate with me in rooting out this weakness which is upsetting you and for which, whatever you may say, you cannot blame me. Do not show him contempt or bitterness; in spite of all the tender friendship and respect I feel for him, I would rather that he hated me than that he be exposed to the least temptation to forget the consideration he owes you. You have too keen an interest in his welfare not to work for it ardently; but you cannot succeed by yourself, especially if you try to fight his inclination by authoritative commands, or by drawing an unfavorable picture of me, even if it be a true one. Doubtless this passion is a very strong one as it has persisted so long, so hopelessly, in spite of your insults to me, in spite of the travels upon which you have sent him. And yet he has not seen me during a stay of eight months in Paris, at least not in my house. He did not know whether I would admit him. I thought him cured and that was my reason for receiving him during my recent illness. As any one must understand, my friendship with him would be very pleasant, were it not for this unfortunate passion which astonishes as much as it flatters me, but which I do not wish to abuse. You fear that if he were to see me, he might forget his obligations, and you exaggerate this fear so much that you go to the length of using force. But, Madame, it is not fair to inflict so many kinds of unhappiness upon him. Do not add a new injustice to the one I show him. It were better to pardon him. Let all his hatred fall upon me and let your own goodness soothe and heal him.

"I shall write to him if you wish it; I shall never see him again if you demand it; I shall even retire to the

country if you think it necessary; but do not threaten to send him to the end of the world! He can be useful to his country, a joy to his friends, an honor to his mother; it is essential, however, to direct his great gifts wisely and to give his fine qualities a chance to unfold. Forget for a while that you are his mother, if it is that which prevents you from giving him your kindness. Please do not refuse it to him. To be brief, Madame, you will sooner see me lead a retired life, or else bestow my love upon him, than to find me content to know him tortured by me and at the same time because of me."

At the time this letter was written d'Argental knew nothing of it. It touched him deeply when sixty years later at the age of eighty he found this beautiful thing among his mother's papers.

The devotion shown by Adrienne Lecouvreur is all the more moving because she was the first actress of France.Voltaire fought to raise the daughters of the stage in public opinion. Adrienne's story shows how poorly he succeeded.

5

The ladies of the aristocracy contended for the favor of Maurice of Saxony. One of the rivals of Adrienne Lecouvreur was the young Duchess de Bouillon. Apparently she followed the actress with envious eyes from her loge, for, one evening when Adrienne was playing Racine's *Phèdre,* losing her patience, she turned boldly to her rival with Phèdre's speech:

> Je suis point de ces femmes hardies
> Qui portant dans le crime une tranquille paix
> Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.

This sounds like an insult, but it must have been a reply to some threat; otherwise the word crime means nothing.

In July, 1729, a little hunchback abbé had an interview with Adrienne, and he must have said something that made her suspect the Duchess.

His name was Siméon Bouret, and he was the eldest son of the Treasurer of Metz.

The father on account of business had to spend the summer of 1727 in Paris and he took his seventeen-year-old son along. At Christmas, 1728, they again came to Paris and when the father was called back to Metz by his official duties, he left his son in the capital to study drawing and painting, for which he was undoubtedly gifted.

The young man lived in a rooming house, and spent nearly all his evenings at the Théâtre Français, as he was very fond of the drama. During his first stay in Paris he had met a young nobleman, de Périgord, who was greatly interested in art and wished to become a painter. As a painter he remained mediocre. But with the little abbé he visited the Academy of Arts, which at that time was in the Louvre, and thus the two became comrades.

A month after his return to Paris the abbé again met de Périgord who suggested that they visit the fair at Saint-Germain. On the way they met a third young man, sixteen or seventeen years old, who wore livery and was introduced to them as the page of the Duchess de Bouillon. On their way they stopped to look at the display of an art dealer, and as Bouret looked attentively at the pictures the page asked if he knew anything about painting. He answered that he was a painter of miniatures and the page requested him to paint his portrait. The abbé consented.

The page lived in the Hôtel de Bouillon, Quais Malaquais, very near the rue de Marais, where Adrienne Lecouvreur had her apartment. There the very next morning the abbé started to work on the portrait. In a week it was finished and set in a snuff box of tortoise-shell.

6

A short time later when the comrades met in the gateway of the Hôtel de Bouillon to visit the fair a second time, the page informed Bouret that he had shown the portrait to the Duchess and she thought it well done. He then took him into the palace and introduced him to the Duchess.

She said many nice things about the portrait,

drew his attention to some faults, and asked him at once if he would not like to paint her portrait. Bouret answered it would be a great honor. He promised to return in two days. This was at the end of January or beginning of February, 1729.

The Duchess, who was then about twenty-two, was of one of the most famous families of France, the house of Guise. Her maiden name was Louise Henriette Françoise de Guise. Four years before she had become the fourth wife of the rather decrepit grand seigneur Emmanuel Théodore de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duke de Bouillon, who was nearly forty years her senior.

Bouret, who painted her portrait, describes her: very comely; rather tall than short; an oval face, rounded beneath; open forehead, black eyes, black eyebrows, dark hair; the mouth strongly turned upward, very red lips, a large mole near the right eye.

That the abbé was really introduced to the Duchess is proved by the correct description he gives of the furniture and works of art in her boudoir.

The young ladies of high nobility led a free life without risking serious disapproval; it was suspected (as reported in Paulmy's *Sottisier* and in the *Memoirs* of Maurepas) that the Duchess chose her lovers impartially, now from among the favorites of the stage, now from those of her own rank: actors and singers as well as princes, among them Quinault Dufresne of the Théâtre Français, Tribou of the Opera, Grandval who, in 1729, made his first appearance on the national stage, and was at this time the declared favorite, and the Compte de Clermont, of the royal family. Nevertheless, she developed a passion for Maurice of Saxony who was almost officially linked with Adrienne Lecouvreur. He had known her intimately; but he lost interest in the Duchess less on account of Adrienne than on account of a little opera singer, Marie Carton, who the following year accompanied him to the camp at Mühlberg.

The Duchess imagined that her advances were ignored because of the attractions of Adrienne Lecouvreur. She was quite indignant.

7

At the Duchess' request the abbé came to the Hôtel de Bouillon and finished her portrait in eight or nine sittings. During the third sitting, the Duchess, learning of Bouret's great interest in the theater, asked if he knew any actors or actresses and which he considered the greatest. He answered that he knew of none any finer than the brothers Quinault and the young ladies Lecouvreur and Duclos. Thus, he praised an actor whom the Duchess favored and an actress whom she hated.

The Duchess asked: "Do you know Mademoiselle Lecouvreur personally?"—"I know her on the stage only."—The Duchess then told him to try to make her acquaintance or to meet some close friend of hers.—"As you do not know her, you must do me the kindness of delivering to her a letter I am going to dictate."—And she dictated Bouret a letter which supposedly came from a member of the royal family, a prince of the blood. The latter contained a declaration of love to Adrienne and asked her to break off her relations with the Count de Saxe.

At the request of the Duchess, Bouret took the letter but he did not deliver it.—The next day the Duchess told him that the letter was a poor idea but that she had another one. It would not be hard for him as a portrait-painter to gain access to Adrienne Lecouvreur.—But Bouret did not think this would be so easy.—The Duchess answered that the purpose was nothing serious, only to administer to her a love-potion. Bouret, who apparently was very surprised but did not dare to give such a grand lady a refusal, promised to do his best and continued to paint. While he was thus occupied, the Duchess asked him if it was his habit to go to bed early.—"About ten or eleven o'clock."—"Very well, be tonight at the gate of the Tuileries, which leads to the Palais Royal, then I will send for you when I return from the ball."

When he arrived two masked gentlemen asked him if he were there at the request of the Duchess. They further asked him whether he would like to

make money; if so his fortune was made, provided he kept a close mouth in regard to the matters confided to him. He answered he could if it did not concern an underhanded scheme.—"No," said the two, "of course not! You recall the person the Duchess discussed with you; the problem is simply to gain admission to her and give her a few pills which will inspire her with indifference to the Count de Saxe and will make her fall in love with another man." —If that were all there was to it, it ought not to be so difficult.—Bouret was then led to the Duchess who was in tears and was sitting on a stone near the parapet at the Quai du Théâtre. To her companion she mentioned the name of Maurice de Saxe over and over again. The abbé could understand these words only: "I am very unhappy." She wept as though in despair. Finally she told Bouret that she was very well satisfied with him; he could continue his painting the next day.

When he arrived the following day the page was waiting for him as usual and led him to the rooms of the Duchess. While Bouret painted, Madame de Bouillon said: "You know what the two gentlemen told you yesterday. She is an unworthy woman. She must be put out of the way. It would be doing a service to the state. Besides you can be sure of a reward."

Bouret answered he would do all he could to gain admittance to Mademoiselle Lecouvreur's house. The same day and again the day following he overheard whispered conversations between the Duchess and her friends: only the name of the Count de Saxe was audible.

8

It seems that the idea of using the little cripple for criminal purposes occurred to the Duchess because of the combination of his interest in the theater and his talent as painter of miniatures, which gave him an opportunity to meet anyone and should insure him a welcome from any actress.

At first she hopes with his aid and a stupid letter to induce Adrienne to break with Maurice in the hope

of an affair with a personage of even higher station. Then she realizes that this plan, which was really worthy of a schoolgirl, would lead to no result. She resorts to the simpler and cruder means of getting the abbé to deliver a few pills, the effect of which he should believe to be erotic, but which as a matter of fact would be a deadly poison.

The Duchess, therefore, does not scruple to put out of the way a woman of a class below her; she scruples still less knowing that this child of the people is an actress, a profession condemned by the Church. By and by, she let even Bouret penetrate the veil which hid her real intention. Finally she brings up the political-social consideration, that Adrienne's murder would be "a service to the state."

Strange to say, the great lady's passion gave her no insight into the affairs and reactions of him for whom she yearned in vain. Her diagnosis of Maurice's indifference was altogether wrong; she confused the noble, devoted friend with the sensual little creature who really had Maurice in her toils.

It is characteristic of the social state of the day that the Duchess had the imprudence to confide her plot to more than ten persons. In spite of her precaution of having her helpers appear in disguise and under cover of night, she was sure that whatever might happen she would be protected by her high position against the government and the police.

9

When Bouret had finished the portrait, the Duchess told him it would be best for him to stay away from her palace until he had executed the orders of the two eminent gentlemen. He would find them the same evening at nine o'clock at the entrance to the Tuileries. He met them and they asked if he were willing to carry out their scheme. He said he was. At a subsequent meeting he was asked whether he had found a chance to meet Adrienne Lecouvreur. When he answered that he had not, they told him that the matter was pressing; he ran no risk, even though what

he delivered might have a somewhat serious result. —"But suppose she were to die from it?" he asked. Even in that event, he had nothing to fear; a fast coach would be in readiness to take him across the border. Then they forbade him expressly ever to enter the Hôtel de Bouillon or to try to speak to the Duchess for any purpose whatsoever.

It was not really very clever. The abbé was intimidated rather than won over. There was nothing in it for him to be used as the murder tool in a matter which was none of his business. On the contrary, he could be very certain of losing his peace of mind and stood every chance of being executed for murder.

The business struck the young abbé as very weird, and for a whole month he did not appear. But the two disguised gentlemen had him summoned by a servant. In those days it was not advisable for a citizen to resist two *grands seigneurs*. Again he had to listen to the demand to keep his promise.

Honest as he was, he thought it his duty to warn Mademoiselle Lecouvreur of the danger she was in, and following the advice of his father-confessor he tried to drop her a hint. Having sought her vainly at her home he sent her an anonymous note, dated January 24, 1729, in which he asked her to be at a certain hour on the great terrace of the Luxembourg, where she would receive important news. To enable her to recognize him the writer of this letter would tap three times his abbé's hat on approaching her.

Adrienne appeared, accompanied by a man and a woman.

Here, at last, the abbé exchanged a few words with the actress. He told her that he felt obliged to inform her that somebody intended to poison her. Adrienne asked very naturally: "Is it from the Opera that the danger is threatening me?"—"No."—"Then it must be from the Hôtel de Bouillon!"—She told him that she wanted to ask the advice of a competent man. If he would come to her the next day, he would be advised how he should behave.

On July 27, the Count de Saxe interviewed Bouret and among other things asked him if what he said was not a fiction. Adrienne Lecouvreur said: "This comes

from the Duchess de Bouillon." Her sure instinct for the person from whom the danger threatened showed keener than that of the Duchess who was doggedly following a wrong trail. Adrienne forbade Bouret to speak of the matter to others.

The following day as Bouret stood on the street in front of his house, a Savoyard notified him that two of his friends were awaiting him on the Quai de l'Ecole. As in a melodrama, he found there the same disguised gentlemen, muffled in their cloaks. Ordering him to follow, they led the way to the Quai de Louvre, where they violently accused him of having told on them, and threatened to kill him.

Bouret denied having revealed anything and said he was willing to deliver the love-potion; just let them give it to him. He was promised double reward, and given new instructions, absurdly mysterious. The idea, however, was apparently to give him the full burden of responsibility. He was to go on the next day from Pont Tournant in the direction of the marble statue through the little alley of taxus trees. In the second tree at the right he would find a package of pills, most of which were harmless; but three of them would be separately wrapped in paper, and these he should administer to Adrienne Lecouvreur as soon as he got a chance. But first they would like him to obtain for them a portrait of the Count de Saxe.

Undeniably, they were asking a great deal of the poor fellow. Under penalty of their anger and their revenge, the eighteen-year-old little cripple, aided only by his minor ability in miniature painting, must quickly become intimate enough with Adrienne Lecouvreur to induce her to take pills and besides to give him a picture of her adored friend.

This demand shows the superstition of the Duchess and her friends; for the portrait was to be used to bewitch the original.

On the morning of July 29, Bouret informed Adrienne and Maurice de Saxe of this. They both advised him to go to the garden of the Tuileries and get the pills. He brought the package to them. They found many white pills and also the three wrapped

separately. After sniffing their odor, they all became ill. Immediately the police commissioner Hénault was informed. But a chief of police under Louis XV was not like Aristides, who was so just that it became necessary to ostracize him. Hénault, though he was indebted to Madame de Prie for his position, had abandoned her as soon as the King denied his favor to her friend, the Duke of Bourbon. Furthermore he had put Voltaire in the Bastille as a penalty for his mistreatment at the hands of the Chevalier de Rohan-Chabot. His justice likewise favored the Guise-Bouillon and the Count de Clermont over a mere actress and a little abbé. On the same evening he had Bouret arrested and sent to the prison of Saint-Lazare, where he was kept for three months. The suspicious pills were given to a member of the Academy of Sciences, Monsieur Joseph Geoffroy, for examination. According to Sainte-Beuve who saw Geoffroy's report (which later disappeared), the chemist wrote his decision in the meaningless jargon so characteristic of the so-called science of chemistry at that time: some of the pills appeared doubtful, but their number was insufficient to form the basis of a reliable opinion.

10

On August 1st Bouret was questioned for the first time. The following day the police-lieutenant Camuset, who had examined him, sent Hénault a report; the dullness is undeniable but the honesty is highly questionable. He says: "Various circumstances tend to show that the abbé invented his entire story." It contains the psychological observation that the abbé, regardless of his crippled condition, was in love with the lady in question.

Through another abbé who had been confined in Saint-Lazare by an order of the King, Adrienne wrote four or five letters to Bouret while he was in jail. He answered them promptly and returned her letters. In her first letter she requested him to retract his statements if they were false, and promised to obtain pardon for him if the matter were his inven-

tion. But it seems that she soon came to see that this was impossible, and through a lackey she sent him three louis d'ors, worth twenty-four francs each, one taler (six francs), two shirts, a bottle of perfume, and a few books which he returned after reading them.

Adrienne addressed a letter to the police commissioner, in which she expressed herself with dignity about the abbé: "I saw and asked him frequently to explain the affair; he answered very sensibly and honestly. Not that I do not hope he has been lying, but I have a hundred times more reason to wish he were insane, if only that it might obtain his pardon! But if he is innocent, think what it means to me that his life is in danger, and how cruel is this uncertainty. Do not consider my station or birth: look into my soul. It is honest and lies bare before you in this letter."

Meanwhile Bouret's father, the treasurer, returned from Metz to Paris to take steps for the liberation of his son. The old man was ill but he did not rest until on October 23rd, 1729, the young abbé was freed. He called on Adrienne Lecouvreur three or four times and she told him that there was a rumor that the Duchess de Bouillon had tried to have her poisoned; freedom, therefore, would still not insure his son's safety. In truth the Duchess de Bouillon gave the police commissioner a sharp reprimand for freeing Bouret.

Unhappily the treasurer fell ill in Paris and could not take his son to Metz. The result was a new Lettre de Cachet of January 23rd, 1730, and a second incarceration, this time in the prison at Fort-l'Evêque. Bouret was charged with "use of poison" and of giving false information to the famous actress Adrienne Lecouvreur.

Adrienne, who had played in *Horace* on January 21st, appeared again on February 4th (in *Electre* and *Le Florentin*), then let a whole month pass without playing, and again returned to the stage on March 5th, in *Le Malade Imaginaire,* next on the 13th in *Œdipe,* and thereafter on March 14th as well as 15th (in *Œdipe* and *Le Florentin*). That evening she made her last appearance. During or right after the per-

formance she became violently ill with what Mademoiselle Aïssé, who was at the theater called "a dysentery, or inflammation of the intestines." After a serious crisis which took place on March 17th the physicians diagnosed it as an "intestinal hemorrhage," and on the morning of the 20th Adrienne Lecouvreur died.

Everything indicates that the Duchess, failing to give her the poison through Bouret, succeeded in some other way. It is of little weight that on her own deathbed, although she confessed many transgressions the Duchess did not admit any guilt in the death of the actress.

Nothing speaks louder for the guilt of the Duchess than that after Adrienne's death she was refused a burial and grave.

At that time one was not too particular with daughters of the stage. Courtiers and court officials dismissed or chastised actresses, just as they liked. For a mere trifle they might be sent to Fort-l'Evêque, or even to a house of correction. This was why the proud and beautiful actress, Mademoiselle Clairon, retired so young. Shortly before, under the gentle Fleury, something still worse had happened: Two very young sisters, noble Spaniards, the dancers Camargo, the elder of whom was a genius transcending her art, disappeared one day, kidnapped by a lecherous rascal, and the police refused to interfere, because he was a nobleman. When the kidnapper had enough of the two young girls, he simply sent them back to the theater, and Paris was content to laugh.

Adrienne, however, was so well liked and admired by the public that at the news of her death Paris became somewhat upset; this, however, did not prevent the priest of Saint-Sulpice, Languet, from refusing to bury her in consecrated soil. She had left a considerable legacy for the poor in her own parish and also in his. To a chaplain who went to her at her deathbed to give her the sacrament, she answered: "Don't worry! I know why you came, Monsieur l'Abbé; I did not forget your poor in my will." Then she turned to the bust of the Count of Saxony, which

stood in her bedroom and quoted: "This is my world, my hope and my God."

Voilà mon univers, mon espoir et mes dieux!

The minister wrote to the police commissioner that it was not the intention of the Cardinal de Fleury to interfere in the question of ecclesiastical burial for an actress; moreover he wished to follow whatever course the Archbishop of Paris and the priest of Saint-Sulpice should deem best. "Should you," he wrote, "as it seems you will, definitely refuse to grant the permission, the body must be removed at night and buried with as little disturbance as possible." It was exactly the same answer as that of Louis XIV, when the actor Baron went to St. Germain to inform the King of Molière's death. Louis said he could not assert his authority over the head of the Archbishop of Paris, but would request the prelate to "avoid scandal."

A Christian burial, therefore, was out of question. After nightfall the body was taken, by order of the police commissioner, from the house in the rue des Marais-Saint-Germain 21 (the house where Racine had lived, later occupied by the actress Clairon) in an old hack, and buried by two porters in a desolate lot.

As mentioned above, Adrienne named young d'Argental as her executor. It was considered unusual greatness of soul that he, a member of Parliament, did not refuse. All he actually had to do was to divide her estate between her two children.

11

The poor abbé was still kept in jail. He was subjected to one cross-examination after another to make him retract his earlier statements; but he stood firm and always described the occurrences the same way.

On May 18, 1730, Père de Couvrigny, a Jesuit who was father-confessor to the prisoners in the Bastille, and who, following instructions, had reproached

Bouret with libel, wrote to the police commissioner that Bouret stubbornly insisted that he had libeled nobody, and that to admit that he had, would be to libel himself. The father-confessor concludes: "The matter is terrible and extremely grave."

Three months later the persecuted Bouret turned in a lengthy moving letter directly to "Monseigneur, le lieutenant de police, dans son hotelle à Paris," and requested protection, pity, and justice. Even if he were to face death with its horrors, he would prefer it to self-defamation.

No answer came, and no liberation. But we can see that Bouret was made to understand the circumstances: without unconditional retraction of his accusation his liberation was impossible.

On August 24 the unfortunate young man sent a retraction as complete as it was senseless. He says he had pretended he had a secret to tell Mademoiselle Lecouvreur, in order to be admitted to her house. He had fabricated the whole thing—the remarks of the Duchess, the page, the disguised men.

Four days later, on September 3, he again gave the lie to all his earlier statements and simply begged to be pardoned.

Probably in order to make him manageable and to make sure that Adrienne's death was well forgotten when he received his freedom, the poor wretch was kept in jail for twenty months. On June 3, 1731, only twenty years old, he was discharged without any further difficulties.

In 1759, the actor Laval wrote in his *Tableau du Siècle* that the priest of Adrienne's parish declined to bury her among believers, "although she had expressed a fervent wish to receive the death sacrament."

Mouval remarks that the priest, according to the laws of that time, was justified in excommunicating her, since she had died without having renounced the stage—as the priest of Saint-Eustache had the right to condemn the body of Molière.

Where he was not justified, was in his refusal to admit her to the cemetery. Even Molière's body was

allowed in the same cemetery in which Rosimond, the actor who died in 1688 without confession, was buried. In other cemeteries the priests had assigned places for Racine's friend, the actress La Champeneslé, who died in 1698, and to the actresses Lavoy and Le Grand (1726 and 1728).

But in the case of Adrienne Lecouvreur, not only ecclesiastical burial, but any burial was refused. The body was not even put into a coffin, but at midnight was lugged into a cab like a package by two porters, accompanied only by a police guard. The police commissioner received a plain order to make impossible any investigation into the cause of the actress's death by destroying all traces. When the body was thrown into a hole and covered with quick lime, a second autopsy was rendered impossible.

The power of the persons who persecuted Adrienne Lecouvreur during her life and after her death, is shown by the fact that not even Maurice de Saxe dared rebel against the mistreatment imposed upon a friend. Only Voltaire who, in close relation with the house of Bouillon, could not or would not believe the Duchess capable of such a thing, protested again and again the way in which France treated its greatest actress after her death.

Today it seems that the lawlessness of pre-revolutionary France was summarized in Adrienne's fate. As a daughter of the middle classes she was not counted in society. As an actress she belonged to a despised profession condemned by the Church.

As the Duchess belonged to the governing caste, and as she had a member of the royal family as a lover, she could use any weapon against a woman of the middle class who was in addition an actress. Adrienne, although the first actress of France, was to the Duchess a *fille de rien*. And the Duchess remained immune to punishment, while the poor little hunchbacked abbé whom she had tried to use as her tool, was locked up almost two years, until he disappeared silently into the unknown.

What really happened remained a mystery for Voltaire, even later for Sainte-Beuve. It has not been

entirely cleared up today, but there can be no doubt that the account given here is correct.

12

The silly, brutal attitude of the clergy toward the defenceless body of the distinguished woman inspired what is perhaps Voltaire's finest poem, which was later set to music by Frederick the Great. In an earlier chapter we spoke of the homage Voltaire paid her during her life. One more instance must be cited. It appears in the oldest edition of *Le Temple du Goût* (1731):

> Lecouvreur plus loin récitait
> Avec cette grâce divine
> Dont autrefois elle ajoutait
> De nouveaux charmes à Racine.

and these four lines:

> Seul de la nature elle a su le langage;
> Elle embellit son art, elle en changea les lois,
> L'esprit, le sentiment, le goût fut son partage;
> L'Amour fut dans ses yeux et parla par sa voix.

Now he wrote the great poem *La Mort de Mlle. Lecouvreur, célèbre actrice.* It begins with an eloquent description of his anguish on viewing the dying woman:

> Que vois-je? quel objet! Quoi! ces lèvres charmantes,
> Quoi! ces yeux d'où partaient ces flammes éloquentes,
> Éprouvent du trépas les livides horreurs! . . .
> Que vois-je? c'en est fait, je t'embrasse et tu meurs!

He describes the general sorrow over the loss and thereafter tells how a grave was denied to one who would have had altars erected to her in Greece:

> Que direz-vous, race future,
> Lorsque vous apprendrez la flétrissante injure
> Qu'à ces arts désolés font des hommes cruels?
> Ils privent de la sépulture
> Celle qui dans la Grece aurait eu des autels.

He points out the unworthy inconsistency in the attitude of those who sighed for her while she was

alive and who now, after her death, treat her like a criminal:

Quand elle était au monde, ils soupiraient pour elle;
Je les ai vus soumis, autour d'elle empressés;
Sitôt qu'elle n'est plus, elle est donc criminelle!
Elle a charmé le monde et vous l'en punissez.

Thereafter he dares to glorify England at the expense of France as the country which has abolished not only tyranny but also prejudice. There, anything can be said, any real worth is respected. In London Adrienne (like Anna Oldfield) would have been allotted a grave in Westminster among heroes and bel-esprits:

O rivale d'Athène, o Londres! heureuse terre!
Ainsi que les tyrans vous avez vu chasser
Les préjugés honteux qui vous livraient la guerre.
C'est là qu'on sait tout dire et tout recompenser;
Nul art n'est méprisé, tout succès a sa gloire.

Here Voltaire emphasizes more and more strongly the shame of France in standing outside of civilization which, re-born from Athens and Rome, reigns in London; he concludes with the bitter question as to why his fatherland was no longer the land of honors and talents:

Des lauriers d'Apollon dans nos stériles champs
La feuille negligée est elle donc flétrie?
Dieux! pourquoi mon pays n'est-il plus la patrie
Et de la gloire et des talents?

Naturally, Voltaire did not dare to have this poem printed. He read it to a few friends but refused to distribute copies of it. He was, however, unwise enough to confide a copy to the most unreliable of his friends, Thiriot, the man whose life consisted of getting Voltaire's manuscripts into his possession and making himself popular by reading them aloud to society. He found even higher favor, apparently, with admirers of the poet, by permitting them to make copies of the works—which Voltaire of course had strictly forbidden.

During his stay in Rouen Voltaire learned that his

safety was threatened because of this poem, and that the trail led back to Thiriot. One cannot but admire the consideration with which he writes him, the politeness with which he assumes that of course no one possesses a copy. The letter is dated June 1:

"You will remember that about a month ago I sent you several verses on Mlle. Lecouvreur's death, the expression of my natural sorrow, and a perhaps too ardent indignation over the manner of her burial. . . . I am highly obliged to you for your discretion in not giving away a copy of it. But I am told that you were in touch with people who have betrayed you by the aid of their good memory; the strongest parts especially were remembered; these have been distorted; they have reached the ears of the ministry and it is not safe for me to return to France whither my work calls me. (As can be seen for safety's sake he makes it appear that he is not on French soil.) I expect you, my dear Thiriot, to inform me about the truth of these rumors and to advise me what to do. Tell me whether you advise me to write and to speak, or to lie low and wait for better times."

The scientific genius Condorcet, who wrote at the outbreak of the revolution in 1789, and who was passionately revolutionary in his sympathies (in 1794 he took poison to avoid being decapitated as a Marquis), says in his enthusiastic *Vie de Voltaire:* "Who would believe that the elegy on Adrienne Lecouvreur could be made the cause of such a serious persecution!" He means that it was the elegy that forced Voltaire to leave Paris. However, we know that he left before that. Meanwhile he lay low in Rouen to wait for the storm aroused by the eulogy to subside. Soon, however, he perceived that the best means of disarming hatred and fanaticism would be a decisive victory on the French stage, by which he could regain the favor of the public. For the theater of these days formed the only bond between the class of people who thought, and that which in daily life did not bother to think. And, odd as it may sound, the casually brought together crowd which forms a theater audience fused into a unit.

13

It was a question of winning this unit for himself. Voltaire tried to do it with the tragedy *Eriphyle,* but it did not fulfill the purpose. Far from being discouraged by this failure, five months after his defeat the poet had a new tragedy on the stage, written in only twenty-two days, and with *Zaïre* he made his greatest success, one which surpassed all expectations and all earlier triumphs by other poets.

During the preparation of these pieces he was, however, in constant unrest. What new intrigues might not the Rohan family hatch against him? He could not settle again in Paris, where he felt he was tolerated rather than entitled to stay. After he left Rouen, persecuted by Jore who had allied himself with Voltaire's bitter enemy Desfontaines, he sought shelter in the house of the Duke de Guise in Arceuil. But the fatal illness of his friend, President de Maisons, called him back again to Paris. The President succumbed to this second attack of smallpox. His loss was a great sorrow to Voltaire.

Restlessly, Voltaire continues to change his place of residence. First he goes to Plombières, then to Rouen. Next he finds a temporary home with the Countess de Fontaine-Martel; she was an elderly lady who had once been a beauty and now, having become rich and a freethinker, lived in grand style opposite the Palais Royal, where she gave Voltaire an affectionate welcome. Voltaire's friend, d'Argenson, found her malicious and miserly. On the other hand Voltaire praises her in his verses because she carried her years so well, never envied younger women but enjoyed the good things life had to offer her. She put no restrictions on her own speech nor on that of anyone who conversed with her. Voltaire praises her soirées and her: she is worldly and happy and does not grudge youth things she liked when young. And in her house reigns freedom:

Vous avez loge à l'Opéra
Au lieu de banc à la paroisse;
Et ce qui rend mon sort plus doux,

C'est que ma maîtresse chez vous,
La Liberté, se voit logée;
Cette liberté mitigée
A l'œil ouvert, au front serein
A la démarche dégagée.

The rehearsals of Voltaire's plays were held at the house of the Countess Fontaine-Martel. She had a little private theater. Here was held the performance of *L'Indiscret* as previously described, and here the actors of the Théâtre Français put on *Eriphyle* for the first time, moving the audience to tears. This is where Voltaire, as he puts it (in a letter of February 3, 1732), won a victory in the first skirmish, which he was compelled to relinquish in the second. His presentiment did not fail him; his success at the public theater was conditional; the audiences applauded various parts which contained attacks on princely power and on superstition, but the apparition in the fifth act was an inevitable failure in a theater where the foppish young aristocratic patrons were permitted to crowd their chairs onto the stage proper, distracting attention by their behavior and narrowing the scope of the actors.

This nuisance was not confined to the French stage. The Shakespearean theater had the same thing to cope with. In the Comédie Française on each side of the stage were four rows of cushioned benches, surrounded by a gilded rail. At extraordinary performances another row was added outside of the rail. Also the back of the stage was filled by fifty persons seated in a semicircle. Anybody will understand how ruinous this practice was to the stage effect. Sometimes the spectators could scarcely distinguish between the noblemen and the actors. A few years later (at a performance of *Athalie,* on December 18, 1738), the stage was so obstructed by benches and spectators that the performance had to be broken off.

It was thanks to Voltaire's energy and his repeated complaints, that these seating arrangements were discontinued in the year 1739.

14

When Voltaire saw that *Eriphyle* was a failure at its first production, his first effort was to restore the confidence of the actors. He requested Count de Clermont, to whom he had addressed a few verses in his *Fête de Bélébat*—a prince who as a descendant of the great Condé had considerable influence—to assemble the actors in his house and assure them of his belief in the play. In addition he wrote a new prologue to be recited by Dufresne, the favorite of the public. When this did not prove sufficient for the success of the tragedy, he recast it entirely, regardless of the complaints of the actors who had to learn their lines all over again.

But this, too, was of no avail. Voltaire made his resolution with habitual firmness. He interrupted the printing which Jore had started, took his manuscript back, stopped its publication, and used only a few lines in his tragedy *Semiramis*. A defeat meant nothing to him. He always had something in preparation —five or six irons in the fire at once; if one failed it stimulated him all the more. He could not be discouraged by the wits who met at the house of Madame de Tencin, among them Fontenelle and La Motte, who seemed so much impressed by his dramatic defeat that they seriously, and with the best intentions in the world, asked him to give up poetry for which he apparently had no talent, and to devote his great abilities to other fields where he surely would be successful.

He went to work at his rapidly outlined tragedy *Zaïre* as he had done before with *Eriphyle;* he not only altered it again and again during the rehearsals but even after the first performance he revised the lines. Dufresne, who was to play the character of Orosmane, and who was used to making playwrights dance to his own tune, lost his patience and continued at the rehearsals to speak the lines in their old form. But Voltaire was more stubborn than the actor. One day when Dufresne was giving a big dinner, he was presented with a gorgeous pie from an

anonymous donor. When it was cut open there was inside a large number of partridges each of which held in its bill a little paper roll. All of these rolls contained corrected verses from *Zaïre*. The actor was compelled to submit, and the play, which had earned considerable applause at its first performance, was a great success. Voltaire had to show himself in his loge and the entire theater applauded him, in thanks for the tears he had drawn from them.

Never had he celebrated such a triumph. Of course, his opponents, as Piron and Le Bland, criticized the play: and most violently, Jean Baptiste Rousseau, although later he denied each of the silly attacks which were proven to have come from him. Rousseau, condemned the play passionately on religious grounds. He emphasized that in Corneille's *Polyeucte*, Pauline's passion is overcome by pity, whereas *Zaïre's* proves to be stronger than pity, stronger than religion. Hence the play was entirely unchristian. Two parodies on *Zaïre* were performed, *Harlequin on Parnassus*, by the Abbé Nadal, and *The Foundlings* by Romagnesi and Riccononi. But both were failures.

Zaïre, according to Voltaire's own opinion, is his love tragedy. Ladies had frequently told him that there was not enough love in his tragedies. His reply was that tragedy was not the right place for this emotion. But since they insisted upon seeing heroes and heroines in love, he was willing to make an exception and please them for once. And in the shortest time he ever took to write a play, he turned out *Zaïre*. It is to the ladies, therefore, that we are indebted for this tragedy.

Undeniably the play was the eighteenth century equivalent of the sex play of today. And not only in France: three years after its premiere in Paris, *Zaïre*, translated by the dramatist Aaron Hill, was played at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, and won thunderous applause. The rôle of Orosmane was given to an amateur of high standing, a relative of Hill's, in order to spare it the unnatural affectations of English actors. The character of Zaïre was

played by an eighteen-year-old debutante, the young wife of Colley Cibber.

The Italian translation was done by no less a person than Count Carlo Gozzi, whose peculiar style was not exactly suited to the task; nevertheless, the translation was excellent and appealing. In the French original Orosmane, after being stabbed, has only one line to say. Nerestan has a final speech of three lines. In the German translation as performed by Lessing in Hamburg, in 1767, these four lines are omitted, to satisfy the impatience of the audience. Gozzi, on the other hand, prolonged this part by adding eight lines to be spoken by the dying Orosmane:

> Questo mortale orror che per le vene
> Tutte mi scorre, omai non é dolore,
> Che basti ad appagarti, anima bella.
> Feroce cor, cor dispietato, e misero,
> Paga la pana del delitto orrendo!
> Mane crudeli—oh Dio!—Mani che siete
> Tinte del sangue di si cara donna
> Voi—voi—dov'è quel ferro? etc.

As can be seen, Italian taste demanded an even stronger tragic emphasis.

15

In *Zaïre,* which Voltaire believed represented the peak of his achievement as a writer of tragedy, one gets a perfect impression of how far from reality French tragedy has grown after its century of development. It is something like the libretto of an opera, which has become absorbed by the melody. The observance of a traditional artistic convention neither would nor could escape this unreality, so long as it refused to allow itself to be influenced by any new ideas except those which could develop within the prescribed limits. It is, for example, an innovation when French characters find a place in the *dramatis personae* of *Zaïre.* Tragedy in France had never before been national. It was always concerned with Greeks, Romans, or Spaniards. It is also unprecedented that in a conflict between love and

religion the weight of the argument should be thrown on the side, not of Christianity, as in *Polyeucte,* but of love. The depicting of jealous murder by a well-born character was another novelty.

Nevertheless, the play must have been a musical entertainment similar to an Italian opera. The emphasis was not on the characters—not one name has been remembered by posterity—but on the cadence and polish of each couplet; on careful balance, within each couplet, and in the structure of the tragedy as a whole, with its symmetrical contracts produced by the variation and synthesis of emotional tempo in the different scenes.

The rhymeless poetic tragedy of England, and of Germany and Denmark, was never musical to this degree. It lacks the chiming tone of rhymed verse. The pair of lovers that moved the audiences of that time so deeply, fail to move us in modern times. What we appreciate is the lesson the poet tried to teach us by the misfortunes of the lovers: namely, the irretrievable harm done by the stress upon the differences in religion. His play teaches that Paganism has its virtues, the same virtues which as a rule are called Christian; it teaches furthermore that even the best Christians destroy normal happiness by regarding the demands of their fanaticism as sacred obligations.

Othello and Desdemona are still read because Shakespeare does not try to teach us anything or improve our morals.

Even the eloquence of the play, which Voltaire's contemporaries accounted its strongest point, is repugnant to us today. It is always too gushing. Voltaire is never content simply to mention Zaïre's royal antecedents. He must use some high-flown figure every time. She always has twenty kings for ancestors; as if there had ever been twenty Christian kings, in Jerusalem!

Vous, le sang de vingt rois, esclave d'Orosmane!

Or again, Zaïre, when left alone for a moment by her confidante, cries out: "The universe doth abandon me!"

Fatime ne vient plus. Quoi! dans ce trouble extrême
L'Univers m'abandonne! on me laisse à moi même.

In addition, the play is afflicted with the clumsiness of the so-called classical style, the desire to use anything rather than simple expressions. For instance, in the part where Orosmane says:

Madame, il fût un temps, où mon âme charmée
Ecoutant sans rougir des sentiments trop chers
Se fit une vertu de languir dans vos fers.

It is typical of this style, that, instead of the simple: "Where are you going?" he says portentously: "Où portez-vous vos pas?" and instead of "Let us go," he says: "Otons nous de ces lieux!"

But we must overlook those weaknesses in *Zaïre* which are common to all French tragedies, even the best. In the fundamental idea of the play there is something which Lessing later adopted in his *Nathan der Weise,* where Orosmane is replaced by his prototype, Saladin; and in the relation of the main character Orosmane to Zaïre, we can see something prophetic of Goethe's Thoas, another Scythian king, in his relation to Iphigenia.

16

Voltaire felt his position becoming more and more precarious. Some unknown person published his *Epistle to Urania,* which he had written ten years previously to the Marquise de Rupelmonde. In it, you remember, he discussed religion very plainly. Although the poem was anonymous, public opinion discovered its author. Not only the pious, but the conservatives as well, were furious. It was to be expected that the authorities would interfere. The chancellor d'Aguesseau asked his secretary, Langlois, what he thought about it. The answer was. "Monseigneur, Voltaire ought to be locked up somewhere out of reach of pen, paper, and ink. He is dangerous to the state." The Archbishop of Paris, M. de Vintimille, complained to the police commissioner and

Hénault summoned Voltaire to him. Voltaire, however, emphatically asserted that the Epistle was not written by him but by the deceased Abbé de Chaulieu, whom he had heard recite it frequently.

The young actress, Mademoiselle Gaussin, who played Zaïre, had given an excellent performance in an earlier rôle, as Tullie, in *Brutus*. At that time Voltaire dedicated the following humorous verses to her:

Que le public veuille ou non veuille,
De tous les charmes qu'il acceuille
Les tiens sont les plus ravissants.
Mais tu n'es encor que la feuille
Des fruits que promet ton printemps,
O mar Tullie, avant le temps
Garde-toi bien qu-on ne te cueille.

It seems that the fruit mentioned here was plucked in good season, and the plucker was none other than he who expressed the fear that it might be plucked too soon.

Voltaire wrote many verses to Gaussin, among them the following on the occasion of her twentieth birthday in August, 1731:

Le plus puissant de tous les dieux,
Le plus aimable, le plus sage,
Louison, c'est l'Amour dans vos yeux.
De tous les dieux le moins volage,
Le plus tendre et le moins trompeur,
Louison, c'est l'Amour dans mon cœur.

His gratitude was great when Mademoiselle Gaussin made a triumph as his Zaïre. He paid homage to her in the poetic epistle (the thirty-ninth) which is woven into the dedication of the piece. The epistle begins:

Jeune Gaussin, reçois mon tendre hommage,
Reçois mes vers au théâtre applaudis!
Protège-les: *Zaïre* est ton ouvrage;
Il est à toi, puisque tu l'embellis.
Ce sont tes yeux, ces yeux si pleins de charmes,
Ta voix touchante, et tes sons enchanteurs,
Qui du critique ont fait tomber les armes.

Perhaps this homage was not too exaggerated. The charm of the young actress probably helped in dis-

arming the critics. The poem closes with a fiery outburst:

Heureux cent fois le mortel amoureux
Qui, tous les jours, peut te voir et t'entendre,
Que tu reçois avec un souris tendre,
Qui voit son sort écrit dans tes beaux yeux,
Qui, pénétré de leur feu qu'il adore
A tes genoux oubliant l'univers,
Parle d'amour, et t'en reparle encore!
Et malheureux qui n'en parle qu'en vers!

When the performances of *Zaïre* were interrupted for some time because of an illness of Mademoiselle Gaussin, Voltaire had it played at the house of Madame Fontaine-Martel; several times he himself played the rôle of Lusignan (as he often did later). He played the part with such fire and verve that it seemed to some spectators a bit too virile and active for a man who was supposed to have been imprisoned for twenty years.

But apparently Voltaire preferred an excess of vividness, although in general he abhorred ranting on the stage.

Once he was coaching a young actress, and thinking her too phlegmatic he explained to her how in his opinion the rôle should be played. She answered: "One would have to have the devil in one's body to play that way." "Yes," he responded, "that's exactly what one must have."

On another occasion a beginner irritated him by her constant gesticulations; he tied a band around her right arm and standing in the wings he held the other end of the band in his hand to force her to a quieter rendition. At first she subdued her motions; but when she finally got warmed up to her part she threw up her arm so passionately that the band broke.—"Excuse me!" she said, "I know that was wrong."

"On the contrary, on the contrary!" he exclaimed. "That is just as it should be. I hoped you would break the band. When the gesture comes from the heart, then it is right."

17

In January, 1733, Voltaire's hostess, the epicurean philosopher in female dress, the Countess Martel, fell fatally ill, and Voltaire had the difficult assignment of telling her of her approaching end. She would have neither priest nor sacrament. But characteristically of the spirit of the time, Voltaire thought himself bound to see that she should not pass away without being on good terms with the Church. He wished this for himself, too. So he brought a priest to her. Afterwards, with his habitual lack of feeling, he gave a burlesque account of how the Countess, under pressure, submitted to the last ceremony.

About this time appeared a well-known poetic composition *Le Temple du Goût,* a true production of the eighteenth century, written partly in verse, partly in prose. In it he discussed the writers of Louis XIV's and his own time very flippantly, but in general so truly that posterity has concurred in his estimate. In some cases, as in that of J. B. Rousseau, he criticized with a punishing wit sharpened by the ideas of the exiled poet. The work has about the same value that Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* had for the previous period.

It caused a furore. People were shocked that Voltaire dared criticize such great writers as Rabelais or Bayle. On the other hand, contemporary writers who were praised in this work, like Count de Caylus, indignantly demanded from Voltaire that he omit their names; they were noblemen who wished to be regarded as dilettantes only, not as writers.

Voltaire's polite answer to Caylus read: "I must say that I prefer the pleasure of obeying you to the pleasure of glorifying you." Whereupon Caylus answers like a true aristocrat: "Again I thank you for your politeness; it reaches its height in the event that I do not find my name in the new edition."

The storm that came up over this little work was the fiercest that Voltaire had had to weather so far. The whole reading world became worked up over it.

Parodies of it appeared in the small theaters which correspond to the modern revues.

The puppet theater gave the signal for the attack. Its play is rather broad: Polichinel is ill. He is advised by a physician to let himself be flogged in order to raise a perspiration. But this treatment had been tried without success. Another physician advises a purgative; a Temple of the Taste (*Le Temple du Goût*) is brought onto the stage, and it turns out to be a night-stool. The joke, however, proved too coarse, and the play was ordered withdrawn.

Next, the Italian theater went to work. In the skit played there, Voltaire was taken off in a square-cut English suit which, to emphasize his supposed stinginess, was of cotton, not of wool. He behaved like a complete fool, expressed himself very stupidly and without the slightest notion of good critical judgment. Thus he was supposed to represent bad taste as opposed to good.

References of contemporaries prove that some of them were pained by such a silly attack on a highly esteemed writer. Voltaire joked about it. He wrote to Thiriot that since Socrates had had to be content to be brought onto the stage by Aristophanes, it was not up to him to complain about the Romagnesi's satire.

After the death of Madame de Martel, Voltaire continued to live at her house for some time. In May, 1733, he moved to a house in the rue du Long Pont, the property of a rich corn merchant, whom he had met at the home of one of his father's clerks. As he believed the corn business profitable he let Demoulin speculate for him, and not without success.

The street on which the house stood was narrow and unattractive, but Voltaire installed himself as comfortably as possible and invited young and old friends for dinner. Shortly after he had settled in these quarters he saw for the first time the lady who was to fill the next seventeen years of his life. Voltaire knew the Duchess de Saint-Pierre; he knew her friend, the intelligent and brave Louis de Brancas, Count de Forclaquier, son of the marshal. They visited him occasionally. One day the Duchess brought along her intimate friend the Marquise du Châtelet,

and this trio came one evening for dinner, a modest, impromptu feast of chicken fricassée, which was followed by excellent champagne. That occasion inspired the following short verse:

Ciel! que j'entendrais s'écrier
Marianne, ma cuisinière,
Si la duchesse de Saint-Pierre,
Du Châtelet et Forcalquier
Venaient souper dans ma tanière.

This is the beginning of the friendship between Voltaire and the Marquise du Châtelet, who shortly thereafter made possible for Voltaire many quiet and fertile years of work. At first it was a passionate love affair, but in the course of time it changed into a spiritual relationship, in which the man found self-content and calm while the woman suffered from Voltaire's frequent journeys and his negligence. She wanted something more than platonic affection.

18

Gabrielle Emilie Le Tonnellier de Breteuil was born on December 17th, 1706. When she met Voltaire, in the early summer of 1733, he was thirty-eight years old and she was twenty-six. She was only eighteen when she was married to the Marquis Florent Claude du Châtelet-Lemont who was descended from an old family of Lorraine. He allowed himself to be entirely under her thumb. He was a typical gentleman and officer of that time. The couple had a son and a daughter, and beyond that they did not bother each other.

Voltaire had seen Emilie at her father's as a little girl. One of the writers who belonged to the little court of the Duchess of Maine, in Sceaux, a witty man by the name of Dumas d'Aigueberre, brought them together again.

As a mere child she had learned Latin and Italian; at the age of fifteen she began to translate Vergil, and she was early attracted by mathematics. But regardless of her considerable talents she was first of all a woman, and a very passionate one at that. When her

husband early ceased to pay her attentions, she surrendered to temptation and began a love affair with the Marquis de Guébriant. When Guébriant before long cooled off she attempted to commit suicide. This remained no secret; and the rhymesters of the time made their jokes about it. Maurepas discussed it in detail in his memoirs. Later, she had the brief adventure already related with the Duke of Richelieu.

We have several portraits of her and it is not hard to visualize her as she was when Voltaire met her for the second time. She seems quite handsome in the portraits by Nattier and Latour and Marie Anne Loir, although these were painted at an advanced age. She had peculiarly sympathetic features. She was never a beauty. Tall and slender, she had a distinguished head, a large nose, a very nicely formed mouth, a strong chin expressing will power, big, appealing eyes, clear and green as the sea, surmounted by heavy eyebrows. The entire face seemed to be dominated by the forehead which was high and thoughtful. Her long, black hair was curled like a child's, and pinned up in the back; the bust was voluptuous but firm. According to the amiable Madame du Deffand, her arms and legs were a little too sturdy. She spoke fluently and rapidly but in society she knew how to express herself so naïvely that nobody could suspect her scientific knowledge.

19

When she allied herself with Voltaire she was still very emotional; her intellect was just developing. What she knew about the fine arts and science, was mainly music; she had a good voice, liked to sing and was familiar with the operas. As a rule, she preferred the lighter, soothing music to the heavier. But when she attended a private rehearsal of *Samson,* the libretto of which was written by Voltaire at the request of the composer Rameau, Madame du Châtelet seemed to be won entirely by the queer old composer. "My gratitude," she writes, "is as great as the pleasure I enjoyed, and that means a great deal. I was espe-

cially delighted with the overture, the dance and the violin melodies. The third and fifth acts are admirable." Shortly before the premiere, however, the performance of the opera was prohibited under the pretense that the theme was biblical, although the Italian theater was permitted to produce a *Samson,* in which Harlequin appeared as Samson's servant and had a row with a turkey.

Thus, Voltaire's growing musical ambition was nipped in the bud. He wanted to demonstrate that he could instill new life into opera by cutting down the tedious recitals and replacing them with arias, which blended the French taste with the Italian, and gave the ballet a rich ceremonial appearance. But it is psychologically interesting to read his text and see how he visualized the old biblical story.

In his opera he allowed no speaking—all singing, and the hero was not given a confidante. The audience should not have to endure a constant repetition of French feminine endings so annoying to the ear. The absurdities in the story must be eliminated. One should not expect Rameau to "distribute Samson's jawbone of an ass in notes of sixteenths." No bees should be found in the carcass of the dead lion, for bees do not swarm in dead flesh. Finally, Delilah must not be the unworthy character of the Bible and she must not distract attention from the hero. The main feature should be, not his amorousness, but his heroism.

20

One of the most appealing sides of Voltaire's character was his constant readiness, the moment he had a little money, to help the many young people who turned to him for help. It is astonishing that he, who had such early, bitter lessons in the ingratitude of his fellow men, was so ready to give these strange people access to his person and to his house. It seems as though no unpleasant experience could change the inborn nobility of his nature.

At about this time an obscure young abbé, named Michael Linant, who wrote verses, insinuated himself

into Voltaire's favor. Voltaire not only supported him, but also introduced him to his friends. First Voltaire hoped to get Madame de Martel to take him in: Linant could live just as Voltaire did, make himself useful and be rewarded for it. But Madame de Martel did not want to have anything to do with the new protégé. At Voltaire's hearty recommendation she had already taken care of Thiriot, whom she gave an annual allowance of twelve hundred francs, in return for which, of course, he did nothing. She was shy of Voltaire's latest protégé. The poet recommended him still more warmly to Cideville in Rouen: "Linant's verses are as graphic and colorful as they are harmonious. True, as a poet he has too many ideas and too great a poetic passion; but these are the faults of youth, which will be eliminated by time, and in conversation he is far softer-spoken than in his verses."

Cideville treated Linant as if he were his own son. Nevertheless, Voltaire did not let the young man out of sight, he recommended him to the Duchess of Maine as a reader, begging Madame du Deffand for the sake of her pleasure and the pleasure of the Duchess, to secure the position for this very promising young abbé.

But the Duchess stood firm; she had no desire to have Linant near her. This was not surprising; he lisped, stammered, and was very near-sighted; besides that he was cock-sure and obstinate. "What shall I do with him?" Voltaire, in 1732, writes to Cideville. "He can't be a secretary, as he cannot write legibly, and I very much fear that he has the amiable quality of laziness, which is no small vice in a man who has to make a career. Couldn't Cideville secure him a position with the Archbishop of Rouen?"

In the following year (May 29, 1733) Voltaire again writes to Cideville about Linant: "If the abbé wants to return to Paris, I will rent him a room somewhere near here; then he can eat his lunches and suppers with me." The abbé didn't have to be asked twice. He arrived posthaste. Voltaire had absolutely no use for him. He already had a secretary, a certain Céran,

who read the Latin poets aloud to him and copied his verses, carelessly and badly. As Voltaire himself had no time to entertain Linant outside of mealtimes, and as the somewhat simple Céran did not seem sufficient company for the abbé, he took another young man into his house, a poet named Lefèvre and Voltaire now had three poor, tragedy-writing young people to feed and support.

After some time, Linant returned to his protector Cideville, in Rouen, but soon was back again in Paris, where Voltaire gave him the outline of a tragedy on Rameses the Great, which he began to elaborate. In September, 1733, however, Voltaire had to report that Linant had left him, without having finished even one scene of the tragedy; and now he begins to have serious doubts about the future of his protégé.

With moving naïveté he writes to Cideville: "Seriously considered, it does not appear certain that Linant possesses any of the rare talents without which poetry is a miserable handiwork. It would be a real pity if he were wasting even a little genius with so much laziness. Please encourage him to work . . . he had the intention of becoming a teacher, but knows scarcely any Latin. If you like him, my dear Cideville, do not spoil him with too much praise, but induce him to learn to do something."

To Linant himself Voltaire writes a brief poem urging him to diligence. It says that idleness may be a virtue in the rich or in those who have a life full of work behind them; but with the poor it always is a vice, and anyone who is as ambitious as Linant should make himself a bed of laurels before he thinks of lying down.

> Courtisans de la gloire, écrivains ou guerriers,
> Le sommeil est permis, mais c'est sur des lauriers.

On December 27 of the same year, Linant informs his protector that he "has renounced the theater," and now Voltaire is forced to relinquish his high hopes of the abbé. But he does not abandon him for all that. When Linant has offended a prominent

lady, the Countess Neuville, by an impudent love-letter, Voltaire makes excuses for him, even writes a little poem on the occasion, addressed to the Countess, in which we find the following lines:

Il est difficile de taire
Ce qu'on sent au fond de son cœur;
L'exprimer est une autre affaire,
Il ne faut pas parler, si l'on n'est sûr de plaire,
Souvent l'on est fat, en montrant trop d'ardeur.

In the year 1736, he let Linant have the profits from his play *L'Enfant prodigue*. In the summer of 1735, he gave him—much as Madame du Châtelet opposed it—a position as teacher for her son. But Linant had scarcely arrived when, unmindful of the respect he owed the mistress of the house, he sent a letter to her from an estate in the vicinity, which he had visited uninvited; he concluded it rudely with the following words: "The tediousness in Cirey is of all tediousnesses the greatest." He showed this letter to his hosts who promptly urged Madame du Châtelet to dismiss him. Out of pure goodness of heart, Voltaire let the culprit stay and even spared him reproaches.

Linant proceeded to play the superior. To Voltaire's anger he never spoke of his benefactor in Rouen as "Monsieur de Cideville" but as "dear Cideville." When Madame du Châtelet wished to dismiss him for this, Voltaire pleaded with her, that Linant was just a boy, he was twenty-seven, without much knowledge of the world; that he would die of starvation if he were driven out, lazy and ignorant as he was; and that, after all, he knew enough Latin to give instruction in it, "at least to learn it at the same time with his pupil." At any rate, he could guide his pupil's method of thought.

Meanwhile, Linant asked Voltaire's protection and shelter for his sister; she, too, might live in Cirey. When Madame du Châtelet demurred, Voltaire succeeded in securing her a position as governess for Madame de Richelieu's child. Unfortunately the child did not live long, and Voltaire again pressed his friend to overcome her prejudice, and take the girl in. And he did this in spite of the fact that he had

good reason to suspect that Mademoiselle Linant, who was just as haughty as her brother, felt she was too good to enter the service of Madame du Châtelet.

Linant, finally, had started to do some work, and as Voltaire jokingly writes, it looked as though in about fourteen years the young man would finish the fifth act of a tragedy. But brother and sister behaved so arrogantly that Madame du Châtelet found it "absolutely necessary" to dismiss them both.

Regardless of all this, Voltaire continued to let Linant have indirectly (through the publisher Prault) small sums of money, with repeated expressions of sorrow that the young man did not want to assure his future by decent behavior, when it would have been so easy for him. "His pupil," he writes, "would surely have pensioned him even after his schooling was over; there is honesty and ambition in the Châtelet family. Whoever has educated a du Châtelet lives in the house in comfort until his death." (Letter of December 23, 1737.) On November 28, 1750, Voltaire reports Linant's pitiful end: "He died of poverty brought on by his own laziness."

We have seen how impatient Voltaire's temperament could be. But in this as well as in hundreds of other such cases we see him as the most indulgent man in the history of the world.

21

The success of *Zaïre* encouraged the poet to write a new tragedy. In February, 1733, he wrote to Thiriot about his latest work *Adélaide du Guesclin:* "The theme is French and is my invention throughout, and I have filled it as full as I could with love, jealousy, excitement, decency, honesty and greatness of soul."

As famous as *Zaïre* and as unknown as *Adélaide* have become, *Adélaide,* in spite of its romantic foundation, is quite as effective as *Zaïre.*

Adélaide is a tragedy such as Oehlenschläger liked to write a century later, a tragedy in which as in a stained glass picture, personalities are depicted in great, simple sketches, with clear outlines, each ex-

pressing a few emotions that are pure because they are uncomplicated, and hence are easily got over from the stage.

Madame du Châtelet, as well as Louis de Richelieu, appear to have been enchanted by *Adélaide du Guesclin*. A letter from the former to the Duke reads in part: "I am delighted that you are pleased with Adélaide. The play moved me. I find it tender, noble, well-written; the fifth act is especially delightful. It probably will not be played soon; for the poor little actress Dufresne is desperately ill; she has sent back her rôle."

As we can see, the chivalric-heroic tone of the tragedy did not fail to have its effect on Voltaire's friend, although her inclination was more to mathematics and the natural sciences, and she did not enjoy poetry very much.

The poet's friends awaited the first performance with high hopes. It was given on January 18. They failed to take into consideration, however, that his recently published work *Le Temple du Goût* had caused great embitterment. The play was hissed from the first act on. The hissing doubled in the second act when the Duc de Nemours, arm in sling, appeared on the stage. Finally the play was drowned in laughter. At the end of the play when Vendome asks: "Are you content, Coucy?" a wit in the crowd answered, "Comme çi," (so-so). A tumult broke out and the words were mockingly repeated from sides of the theater.

In 1752, the tragedy was successfully taken up again, under the title *Duc de Foix*. Fearing ridicule, Voltaire weakened the play considerably in this revision. But more than thirty years after the premiere, in 1765, the actors, without the poet's permission, performed the play with its original form and title. It was received with universal and enthusiastic applause. Madame du Châtelet lived to see only the defeat, not the victory.

Voltaire tells us an anecdote about the banker Högger (Voltaire drolly spells the name Oghières) who had commissioned the composer Mouret to write a march for one of Charles XII's regiments. Mouret

played the march in the presence of invited guests at the banker's home. They all found it abominable. So the composer made use of it in one of his operas, which was attended by the banker and his friends. "That is the kind of march we wanted," they said to Mouret. "Why didn't you give us one like that?"

"It is the same," Mouret responded.

22

Voltaire was requested by the Duke of Richelieu to arrange a second marriage for him. The reason for this step is unknown. Voltaire pretends that the idea was originated by him. This, however, seems incredible. He wrote to Cideville that he had handled the affair like the intrigue in a play, and that he was the witness at the wedding. The bride was Marie de Guise, of the famous family which for a long time was the first of France after the house of Valois, and which was the most dangerous rival of the royal house. Nevertheless, the bride's parents, the Duke and Duchess of Guise, led a life which was a scandal (according to President Hénault), even in this anything but straightlaced age.

The house of Guise, was of far greater consequence than the house of Richelieu. Therefore the Duke de Guise would hardly have consented to the marriage had Richelieu not waived the matter of dowry. It was Voltaire who drew up the contract. He wrote various poems on the occasion of the wedding.

As a young girl Mademoiselle de Guise had already received poetic tribute from him:

> Vous possédez fort inutilement
> Esprit, beauté, grace, vertu, franchise,
> Qu'y manque-t-il? Quelqu'un qui vous le dise
> Et quelque ami dont on dise autant.

During the weeks preceding Richelieu's wedding he wrote a brief poem to her, which seems to be inspired by her courage in entering into such a risky alliance; in pretty verse it gives her a bit of prosaic, but practical advice. The end reads:

Vos doux appas auront la gloire
De finir l'amoureuse histoire
De ce volage Richelieu!
Ne vous aimez pas trop, c'est moi qui vous en prie
C'est le plus sûr moyen de vous aimer toujours;
Il vaut mieux être amis tout le temps de la vie
Que d'être amants quelques jours.

According to her contemporaries, Mademoiselle de Guise had lovely eyes, but otherwise was not especially good-looking; it seems that she had the bad habit of talking about herself a great deal and no less about her father. Considering her father's reputation—he was said to have tried to help his luck at cards—this was rather ill-chosen. Hence the following polite, but astonishingly bold admonition to the young lady from Voltaire:

Plus mon œil étonné vous suit et vous observe,
Et plus vous ravissez mes esprits éperdus;
Avec les yeux noirs de Vénus
Vous avez l'esprit de Minerve,
Mais Minerve et Vénus ont reçu des avis;
Il faut bien que je vous en donne
Ne parlez désormais de vous qu'à vos amis
Et de votre père à personne.

Still more characteristic of the free language of that time in erotic matters is the epithalamion Voltaire sends to the Duchess. One can see from this poem that Richelieu's past was too well known to remain concealed; at the same time one is struck with how lightly and humorously his indiscretions are treated, compared with the severe criticism to which the bride's father was subjected. The poem begins:

Un prêtre, un oui, trois mots latin,
A jamais fixent vos destins;
Et le célébrant d'un village,
Dans la chapelle de Monjeu,
Très chrétiennement vous engage
A coucher avec Richelieu,
Avec Richelieu, ce volage,
Qui va jurer par ce saint nœud
D'être toujours, fidèle et sage.
Nous nous en défions un peu;
Et vos grande yeux noïrs, pleins de feu,
Nous rassurent bien davantage
Que les serments qu'il fait à Dieu.
Mais vous, Madame la duchesse,
Quand vous reviendrez à Paris

Songez vous combien de maris
Viendront se plaindre à votre Altesse?
Ces nombreux cocus qu'il a faits
Ont mis en vous leur espérance;
Ils diront, voyant vos atraits:
"Dieux! quel plaisir que la vengeance!"

The wedding introduced with such merry and frivolous words was, however, shortly after the celebration, the cause of a sad occurrence. Certain of the Guise family were highly incensed by the marriage: a descendant of the House of Lorraine had lowered herself to marry a Richelieu. (They were positive that his father's name was not Richelieu, but Vignerod.) Soon after the wedding the Duke joined the army and there he met his wife's cousins, Prince de Lixin and his brother, Prince de Pons. Both had refused to sign the marriage contract, this was the cause of a quarrel between Richelieu and Lixin, which was followed by a challenge. In the duel the Prince de Lixin was killed while Richelieu received an injury which was believed at first to be fatal, but which soon healed.

23

A month before this event, Voltaire met an unexpected misfortune. The wedding had taken place in April at the castle of Monjeu. On May 8, a letter from the minister ordered an officer at Dijon, Monsieur de la Briffe, to arrest the Sieur de Voltaire at Monjeu, "provided that he was still there," and to have him brought to Château Auxonne. Voltaire had a tip from Maupertuis, and got a letter from d'Argental, advising him to flee at once. Consequently he was not to be found in Monjeu. As far as was known, he had gone to Lorraine (which did not become French until more than a generation later) to try the baths there. The intendant, therefore, returned the royal order as impossible of execution.

The letters on England had annoyed the government. The English edition had a good sale. The London publisher had stipulated that a French edition must not appear too soon, and Thiriot had agreed in

Voltaire's name. Meanwhile the publisher, Jore, was holding the manuscript and Voltaire was afraid he might break the contract. Although the work was already printed, Jore had promised to withhold it. He, too, would have been sure to be put in the Bastille, had he published the book and had it become known that it was he who had printed it.

Jore's father had been in jail three times—a year and a half each time, in 1697, 1698 and 1712—because he had sold books which attacked the Church and the State. In 1731 his son received a *Lettre de cachet*, because he had printed Abbé Desfontaines' ironic preface to an account of the trial of Père Girard and the respectable Cadière. Jore and Desfontaines would both have been thrown into the Bastille, had not Voltaire used his influence to save them.

The authorities learned that an edition of the *Lettres Philosophiques* was in preparation in Rouen, and a detective was sent there. Voltaire upon learning of this wrote Jore and requested him to hide the whole edition at the house of Voltaire's friend, Formont, and to see to it that not a copy could be found. For six months all partners had kept silent. Then suddenly, in the midst of the wedding ceremonies, Voltaire was informed that the *Lettres Philosophiques* were being sold in Paris. Jore, at once sent to the Bastille, blurted out that Voltaire was the author and that the edition was hidden at the house of Monsieur de Formont. The authorities were outraged at the book, and when sentence was imposed, it prescribed that the work "being scandalous, and offensive to religion, good morals and the respect owed to the State, should be burned by the executioner, at the foot of the great stairway." This was done.

The orthodox pamphlets published against the work, charged Voltaire with defamation and degradation of his own people, Abbé Gouget asserted that Voltaire had glorified the barbarous Shakespeare, while he did not even mention the name of the French poet, Grévin: "Jacques Grévin, who died in 1750 at the early age of twenty-nine years, would perhaps have succeeded as well as Shakespeare, had not death cut him off in his prime."

As we saw, the author had been hunted with a warrant even before sentence had been passed upon the work. He had quickly disappeared, and Madame du Châtelet, who had remained, lonely and desperate, in Monjeu, wrote in her distress to Richelieu who had just left for the army, of course in such a way as to leave Voltaire's real place of refuge secret.

"You know that my friendship for you affords me the greatest comfort and consolation in my misfortune. I have met with possibly the worst misfortune. My friend Voltaire—you know my feelings for him—is probably at Château Osonne (Auxonne) near Dijon. He had just left us a few days ago to try the baths in Plombières, which his health has long demanded, when a messenger from Monsieur de la Briffe brought me a *Lettre de cachet* ordering him to Osonne until further notice. The messenger was told that he was in Plombières; I do not doubt that he will shortly receive the King's order and that he will obey. There is nothing else to do, if it cannot be avoided. I simply can't describe how I suffer. I cannot summon the courage to face the definite knowledge that my friend, with his poor health, is in a prison where he surely will die of shame if not of illness. I shall neither have word from him nor be able to send him any information. . . . Oh, under what ironic circumstances did I receive your letter! You envy me the good fortune of being with one in whose company it is so delightful to live. You would be right had this been so. I spent ten days here with him and Madame de Richelieu; I do not think life has ever been more pleasant for me. I lost him when I most strongly felt the happiness of possessing him, and how I have lost him!"

In reality Voltaire had fled to Lorraine. When, however, he heard the rumor that his friend, Richelieu, was fatally wounded, he forsook all consideration of safety, and set out for the army.

24

The cause of the war was that Stanislaw, who, in 1733, was elected King of Poland for the second time,

was driven out by the Emperor Charles VII who, in alliance with Russia, set August III on the throne. A French army marched to the Rhine and encamped near Philippsburg facing Prince Eugene. The result of this campaign was that Stanislaw gave up Poland, but received Lorraine instead, on the condition that after his death it was to be annexed to France.

Voltaire's arrival at the camp was wildly celebrated. Men outdid one another to honor and entertain him. The highest nobles, the seventeen-year-old Prince of Conti, the counts de Charolais and de Clermont, all members of the royal family, all relatives of the great Condé, received him with distinction.

Conti one day saved Voltaire's life, when the latter was mistaken for a spy by soldiers of the Prince's regiment.

The Duke of Richelieu—who had fully recovered his health—was not of a Spartan nature. Although only a colonel in rank, he had in camp for his own use sixty-two baggage-mules, thirty horses, and a swarm of servants. At that time he still fitted the description Voltaire had given of him in his epistle to Pallu,

> Alcibiade qu'à la cour
> Nous vîmes briller tour-à-tour
> Par ses grâces, par son courage,
> Gai, généreux, tendre, volage,
> Et séducteur comme l'Amour
> Dont il fut le brilant image.

One might be led to think from this that Richelieu was not cut out to be a soldier. His later life, however, shows how gifted he was as a commander. Thus, in 1743, trying to remedy the defeat at Dettingen, he showed no little bravery. Two years later, at Fontenoy—he had meanwhile been promoted to major-general and adjutant to the King—it was largely his advice that brought about the victorious outcome of the battle. When the English column resisted all attacks, Richelieu, covered with dust, rode over to the King and begged him to fire four cannon into the enemy, while the troop "*La maison du roi*" and others should attack on both flanks. He person-

ally transmitted the order for this charge. After the battle was won, the King said to him: "I will never forget the important service you rendered today."

When in 1747 Genoa rebelled against its Austrian oppressors and the English blockaded the port so that the inhabitants were short of food, money and amunition, Richelieu was sent to the relief of the city. On a small boat he sailed right through the English fleet, received fresh troops from France and Spain, drove back the enemy in several battles and made the coast line safe. Out of gratitude the Genoese erected a monument to him in their city. On this occasion, Voltaire sent him an epistle, which commences:

Je la verrai cette statue
Que Gêne élève justement
Au héros qui l'a défendue.
Votre grand-oncle, moins brillant
Vit sa gloire moins étendue.
Il serait jaloux à la vue
De cet unique monument.

Richelieu's reputation grew so great that the pretender to the English throne, Charles Edward, when he was ready to embark from France to invade England, requested and obtained Richelieu to command his forces. The venture, however, proved to be impracticable.

In the year 1756, Richelieu accomplished a feat that was really great. With about twenty battalions transported on French ships, he conquered the island of Minorca by defeating the English fleet and storming the citadel of Port-Mahon, which was considered almost as impregnable as Gibraltar. Thirty years had been spent in building its fortifications. He (as well as Voltaire) tried to save the life of Admiral Byng. Byng had done his best, but nevertheless was brought before a court-martial in London and shot. Richelieu, finally, just before Rossbach, conquered the English army under the Duke of Cumberland at the mouth of the Elbe river, forcing the latter to surrender. For these deeds Voltaire glorified his friend in prose and verse. One should note Epistles 92 and 94. In the first are the words:

Mais je médite un gros ouvrage
Pour le vainqueur de Port Mahon.
Je veux peindre à ma nation
Ce jour d'éternelle mémoire.

The second begins with the warm assertion that Richelieu has always been his hero and that he had foreseen his glory:

Depuis plus que quarante ans
Vous avez été mon héros;
J'ai présagé vos destinées.
Ainsi quand Achille à Scyros
Paraissait se livrer en proie
Aux jeux, aux amours, au repos,
Il devait un jour sur les flots
Apporter la flamme devant Troie.

They had been friends since their youth, and Voltaire had loved Richelieu all his life. He had an unquestioning faith which Richelieu often abused.

On the whole, Richelieu remained faithful to Voltaire, did him many a service, accepted many services from him, borrowed large sums of money and honestly esteemed his genius; but he felt under no more obligation than the easiness of his temperament and the insensibility of his nature admitted. On the other hand, Voltaire was an exacting friend.

It is certain that Richelieu dropped his friend's interests very quickly when Court politics made it seem inadvisable to support him—for instance, when Voltaire sought admission to the French Academy.

Everything about Richelieu betrays the typical *grand seigneur* of the eighteenth century. Very aptly he is glorified in Diderot's *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1747) as Selim, the clever and powerful grand-vizier of a sultan who represents Louis XV. His mind was narrow and his heart dry; he was a cynic but an elegant one, who combined an invariable politeness to women with a scorn that was the outgrowth of their shallowness as well as his own. He was not ashamed to serve as go between for the woman he thought the right one for the King. He could not see what more shame there was in offering the sovereign a nice woman than a handsome vase or a precious

jewel. His cynicism included an insuperable skepticism, a superior irony; with this irony, however, he combined the reckless courage of the ancient Frankish warrior.

He had the self-confidence of the successful gambler, but added to it a tact of which he was master. And he had inherited or acquired some of the great cardinal's gift of persuasive speech. Finally—he was glittering, radiant with the splendor of all the lovely, eminent ladies who had loved and embraced him. All felt that they wanted to serve him, observed and speculated for his advantage, and from them he learned to guess, to observe and to feel. He adopted feminine intuition and added womanly diplomacy to his manly courage.

He and Voltaire remained loyal to each other all their lives. They never quarreled for more than a few days, and even then often neither of them was to blame. When, in 1748, Richelieu was ordered by the French Academy to compliment the King upon the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, he asked Voltaire to write a short speech for him. Voltaire did so, but could not refrain from showing the charming little composition to Madame du Châtelet. At that moment the Marquise de Boufflers came to see her and in her enthusiasm copied the speech. Consequently, upon Richelieu's arrival at Court to deliver his speech, the courtiers recited to him parts of it before it was delivered. In his rage he would not hand the King the *Eloge de Louis XV,* which he had brought, but sent the package without a word back to the poet. For he believed Voltaire had intentionally imparted to others that he, not Richelieu, was the author of the speech.

Among Voltaire's epistles there is a very amusing one which originated in the camp at Philippsburg (Epitre 45). Here he reveals for the first time the satirical view of war, which in his case, of course, does not exclude admiration for courage and bravery. It is the epistle which begins with a description of the hardships of war and of the thunder of the cannons which can be heard at the camp:

C'est ici que l'on dort sans lit
Et qu'on prend ses repas sur terre;
Je vois et j'entends l'atmosphère
Qui s'embrase et qui retentit
De cent décharges de tonnerre.

Then he pokes fun at the 50,000 Alexanders at four sous a day, who here, covered with dirt and laurels, fight for the idea called honor. He extols their bravery and finishes his hymn thus: "True, it is a glorious thing to taunt death and Prince Eugene, but oh! what a price you pay for your heroic glamour! All this while your wives and mistresses back in Paris are fitting horns to your heads."

O nation brillante et vaine!
Illustres fous, peuple charmant,
Que la Gloire à son char enchaîne,
Il est beau d'affronter gaiment
Le trépas et le prince Eugène.
Mais hélas! quel sera le prix
De vos héroiques prouesses!
Vous serez cocus dans Paris
Par vos femmes et vos maîtresses.

Voltaire was naïve enough to believe that the authorities would not take offense at this little military escapade. But in that he was wrong. The authorities had it in for him. Soon even he appreciated that he could no longer remain in France, and when the *Lettres Philosophiques* came out, he seriously considered joining Thiriot in London. But he felt a bond which restrained him. In a letter of the end of June, 1734, he expresses this, though not too clearly: "As long as I am loved so warmly by several persons in France, it is impossible for me to seek refuge in another country. Where friendship is, there is one's fatherland." The Marquise du Châtelet, for her part, wrote sadly:

"A hundred dangerous remarks are attributed to him. The minister was glad to seize on this pretext. I am firmly persuaded they plan to ruin him. They speak of exile; I no longer know what to believe. But I know this, that were I in his place, I should have gone to London or to the Hague long ago. I confess to you that all this depresses me greatly. I

cannot get used to the thought of living without him, or of losing him forever. This thought would entirely poison my life."

After one month of restless wandering, Voltaire for the first time settled in Cirey, the manor of the Châtelet family; it was situated on the border between Champagne and Lorraine and thus enabled him to keep one foot in France, the other outside of France, and at the first warning he could easily get to safety.

Cirey was situated—we should say ideally, but in that day it was considered dismally out-of-the-way—in a lovely grass-grown valley between two ranges of high hills covered with forests. It was remote only in so far as one could with a few steps reach the border by going past Saint-Dizier into the little realm of the Duke of Lorraine.

Here was safety and quiet in which to work. Here, a little paradise could be created for two lovers who at the same time were two ardent fellow students. Here was the refuge for the half-willing, half-unwilling exile.

VI

LOUIS XV

1

Considering Voltaire's refuge in Cirey, our first feeling is one of astonishment, that such an isolation should have been necessary in a state whose King, Louis XIV, had staked his honor to be his country's, even Europe's, Mæcenas, and had become famous for it. He not only made architecture, sculpture, and painting arts of the Court, but also surrounded himself with the best wits of the time, and appreciated the works of Racine, Boileau and Molière.

The duty of maintaining this tradition should have been very dear to Louis XV. Actually there was nothing farther from his thoughts. One day, someone dared to propose to the King the possibility of attracting the writers and scholars of the epoch to the Court, as Frederick the Great was doing in such a brilliant manner. Louis protested: "This is not the custom in France, and since there are far more wits and great men here, than there are in Prussia, I would have to have a very long table to assemble them all." Then he began counting on his fingers: "Maupertuis, Fontenelle, La Motte, Voltaire, Piron, Destouches, Montesquieu, Cardinal de Polignac." "Your Majesty has forgotten d'Alembert and Clairaut," said a courtier. "And Crébillon," the King continued, "and La Chaussée!"—"And the younger Crébillon!" somebody remarked, "he is said to be more likeable than his father; and, too, there is Abbé Prevost, and Abbé Olivet."—"Well," answered the King, "all this must have lunched or dined here in the past twenty-five years!"—"All this" was the King's name for France's famous men.

How foreign must literature have been to Louis XV

in his earlier years, if he spoke that way at a riper age, in the days of Madame Pompadour! It certainly was his least care; he left it to others to keep it within its proper bounds.

Even though his relations with the Queen were no longer as warm as at first, the connection between them was not severed until the Queen, either from bigotry or from fear of infection which one of her ladies had talked her into, withdrew from the King. From that time the entire Court was curious to find out to what temptation the King would succumb. His first gentleman-in-waiting—Bachélier, an influential man, who knew that his influence would increase if he could make the King dependent upon his discretion—eagerly arranged an assignation between the King and a certain lady of the Court who showed herself inclined to assume the duties which the Queen had dropped.

Madame Louise Julie de Mailly-Nesle was the first of five sisters to whom the King, either in turn or at the same time, made love. They occupied his time and his thoughts from 1733 until December, 1744, when the last of them, the one of whom he was most deeply enamoured, suddenly died.

During these twelve years, in which Frederick the Great, who was about the same age as Louis XV (born 1712; Louis 1710), was maturing with hard study and hard knocks into a genius, forceful of will, and performing the first great deeds of his life, Louis XV passed his days and nights in love affairs with these five sisters.

2

The Maillys were a family with a military reputation that went back to the eleventh century. The present Marquis de Nesle, father of Mademoiselle de Nesle, could look back upon a distinguished line of ancestors; but he himself was distinguished only for his debts and his excesses. He had started with a yearly income of 250,000 livres, and spent everything, so that he finally eked out a miserable existence by perpetrating frauds.

His eldest daughter, Madame de Mailly (born in 1710) had been married in 1726 to her own cousin, and soon thereafter she had a liaison with a Monsieur de Puisieux. The Court broke that up by appointing Puisieux French ambassador to Naples. Madame de Mailly was a brunette with fiery black eyes, a thin, oval face with a piquant expression, warm cheeks, a ravishing figure, with the proud grace of a bacchante. She was always beautifully dressed and half undressed, famous for her legs which were called the most shapely at Court. She was really in love with her own beauty. She never went to bed without dressing her hair and adorning herself with all her diamonds.

She burned with desire for the King, and found him "darling, like Cupid" and attracted his attention by means of her uncle, the Duke of Richelieu; she left it to Bachélier to arrange their first meeting and to work upon the King who in his youth was always shy and diffident, until the connection was made. Louis XV was, like so many degenerates, in the bottom of his soul filled with a desolate melancholy, so that at times he did not want to see anybody. He had no ambition for anything.

In spite of her coquettish appearance Madame de Mailly was a tender and loving woman who was genuinely devoted to her King. Her love was disinterested—an unheard-of thing for a royal favorite. She was not after a title, or money, or possessions. She was the most comfortable mistress a comfort-loving king could have wished. Her only weakness was her fondness for champagne; even as late as the year 1738 she drank through whole nights with the King. On June 26 of this year he went to bed at six o'clock in the morning (having first heard Mass, to be sure). On July 3 he got up from the table at five in the morning, played checkers for an hour, heard Mass, went to bed and did not get up until five o'clock in the afternoon.

Being parsimonious by nature he kept his mistress short of funds and allowed her to feel all the humiliations of dependency. In the beginning he gave her a handful of gold pieces several times, then nothing;

Bachélier, who happened to witness her embarrassment over the threats of her creditors, interested himself in the matter and persuaded the treasurer Chauvelin, who was anxious for the favorite's goodwill, to take care of her expenses at certain night parties by means of the secret funds of the Ministry of the Exterior. Chauvelin, however, lost his place in 1737, and the Court made fun of Madame de Mailly's patched underwear.

Added to these hardships came the fact that with her twenty-eight years she was, according to the ideas of that time, an old woman, far too old for the King. Her own husband said to everyone who cared to listen to him, that he could not understand what the King found in his wife—she was not even young and was outshone by countless young women in Versailles. These remarks, repeated to the King on all sides, were a deep hurt to his vanity, and made him still harder on his mistress. One night, hearing through the fireplace of his bedroom two of the husbands of her sisters gossiping about the bad taste of the sovereign and about Louise's ugliness, he became so furious that he called down to them through the chimney: "Will you shut up, Flavacourt!"

Meanwhile Madame de Mailly took part in all ceremonies at the side of the King as before; on the rides to the various castles she always sat in his coach. Various ladies tried to flatter her, in order to get positions of honor at the Court. There was the Princess de Charlis, who wanted to have her lover, Vauréal, the Archbishop of Varennes, obtain the succession of Fleury. Likewise there was Madame d'Estrées, who gave the favorite the advice and hints which she received from her lover, Cardinal de Rohan. For a moment these ladies had the poor woman persuaded to demand that the King treat her as *maîtresse en titre,* make her a duchess, etc.; but the King returned answer that the scandals of Louis XIV's time were not going to be repeated; that never in his reign should bastards conceived in double adultery be allowed the same rank as princes of the blood. As can be seen, the King had his code of honor.

Madame de Mailly, who had a daily opportunity to feel the hostile attitude of Cardinal de Fleury, committed the indiscretion of mimicking the aged cardinal and making fun of his nightly carousals and his senile lusts. She reproached the King with being afraid of the old priest. One night she arrogantly asked the King who was by no means anxious to drop Fleury: "When are you going to think of discharging your old teacher?"

3

The favorite was unhappy. She had been more tranquil as long as she could conceal her relations with the King; but after five years the affair had become known, and she counted very little on the courage of the King to defend her against the Cardinal's attacks. The only friend in Court whom she thought she could trust was Bachélier, and it was he who had advised her never to trust anybody at Court.

At about that time, behind convent walls where supposedly the mind was occupied only by pious thoughts and romantic dreams, sat a young girl. It was the younger sister of Madame de Mailly, who sat and dreamed ambitious dreams, planned clear schemes whereby she could win the King's heart, overthrow the Cardinal, and dominate the Court. Daily she wrote to her sister, implored her to take her in, appealed to her goodness, displayed her sentiment, her childish grace, her tenderness, and her wit, surely not without the hope that her sister would show one or the other of her ingratiating letters to His Majesty, and that the King might become interested in the yearning young prisoner confined to the cloister.

Louise de Mailly needed a confidante from her immediate family, and Félicité de Nesle had always been her favorite sister. So she granted Félicité's wish. The young girl arrived and never left her sister's side, accompanying her on all her visits and showing her a more than sisterly devotion. Thus the name Félicité was constantly on Madame de Mailly's lips and before long she was admitted to the most

intimate circle of Louis XV. From May, 1739, on, she lived in the palace with her sister; in June she began to be present at the King's suppers.

Félicité de Nesle was a brunette. She had a long neck and a more youthful but no less attractive figure than her elder sister. Her features were harder, without any trace of goodness or tenderness which was so characteristic of her sister. But she was far more talented and she based her confidence on that. She was lively and wilful, at times so full of wanton ideas that, even though sober, she gave the impression that she had drunk too freely; she affected naïveté when it seemed to make an impression, or flaming coquetry when she thought that was called for, and with it all was so witty, so roguish, and so entertaining that she soon was indispensable to the King, who thought her the most amusing child he had ever met. Soon he went so far as to dine with her constantly; she accompanied him on all his little journeys to Compiègne, to Fontainebleau, etc. He began to tease Madame de Mailly with the virtues of Félicité and contrasted them with her own faults. He even began to quarrel with her over trifles, to make himself unpleasant to her until one day he remarked significantly that he felt as deeply for her sister as for her.

The open interest which the King showed in the young girl, and the necessity which thereby arose to have her married, brought Félicité de Nesle many splendid offers. The Princess de Charolais decided the matter by having the Archbishop of Paris, who wished to become a cardinal, ask for the hand of the young lady for his relative, Monsieur de Luc, who was to take the name of Vintimille at the wedding. In September, 1739, Madame de Mailly notified her friends of the wedding; the King gave the bride a dowry of 200,000 livres, promised her a position as maid-of-honor to the Crown Princess, an income of 6,000 livres, besides an apartment in Versailles. He arrived from his country seat, la Meutte, at the moment when bride and bridegroom were about to retire, and did the bridegroom an honor he had never given anyone, "handed him the shirt." Soulavie, who wrote the memoirs of Marshal Richelieu, and who

assumes that the King's relations with Mademoiselle de Nesle began in June, 1739, insists that the King and bridegroom changed places that night, so that Monsieur de Vintimille spent the night in la Meutte. This, however, is scarcely probable, as the couple lived for some time as husband and wife.

Madame de Mailly agreed to everything; she loved the King unselfishly. Madame de Vintimille, absolutely sure of her power over Louis, did not hesitate to leave her sister near him. While the latter had suffered for a long time from the tiresome, even humiliating influence of the Princess de Charolais, Madame de Vintimille got rid of the lady in the twinkling of an eye; all she did was to draw the King's attention to the Princess' efforts to make her lover, Vauréal, Minister of the Exterior, and the Princess fell into disgrace.

After the death of the Duke of Grammont, Count de Grammont asked the two sisters, with both of whom he was intimate, for a recommendation to the position then vacant, that of Colonel of the regiment of Béarn and Navarre. The presentation of the list of applicants by the Cardinal had so far been a pure formality; the Cardinal himself always made the choice. This time the King at once arbitrarily appointed Grammont to the vacant position. It was not so much a personal interest in Count de Grammont which prompted Madame de Vintimille, as her desire to get the King accustomed to independence of His Eminence.

But Madame de Vintimille also desired to engage in politics and to this end she used her sister as a willing tool. The two brothers Belle-Isle were close friends of Madame de Mailly. Grandsons of the great financial swindler, Fouquet, they had to suffer from this relationship for a long time. The elder brother, later Duke and Marshal, the more able though the more delicate, was a keen politician, quick at repartee and very eloquent. He showed the two sisters that the foreign policy of old Fleury was timid and unwise. War should be declared against Austria and Austria should be divided. It would be quite simple: France would find dependable allies in Prussia, in

Piedmont, and in the elector of Bavaria, for whom France could secure the imperial crown.

Madame de Vintimille wished to reawaken and satisfy the national pride. For that she needed a hero and thought she had found him in the person of the elder Belle-Isle. Belle-Isle was as shallow as he was eloquent.

In vain old Fleury emphasized the obligations France had assumed, the loan she had received, the prospect of acquiring Lorraine, and the King's pledge. All this meant little to the sisters. Madame de Vintimille readily got the King's consent, and war was declared. She had Belle-Isle appointed ambassador to Frankfort, so that he could conduct the election of the emperor, and Charles VII was elected. But things went otherwise than she had hoped, partly because Belle-Isle did not get all the troops he had requested, partly because everything went wrong. France met only defeats, and the eighty-nine-year-old Fleury had to make humiliating advances to Maria Theresa to reëstablish the peace.

In the later editions of his *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV* Voltaire omitted the passage in which he at first openly said that the Cardinal wished to prevent the war, but that the brothers Belle-Isle, supported by a lady in great power at the moment, had resolved to change Europe's physiognomy.

For a moment, it seemed that the brothers had a bright outlook. Marshal Belle-Isle appeared and was treated in Frankfort more like one of the most powerful electors than the French ambassador. It was probably then that he dazzled Bernstorff and became his idol; his pretty wife played a part. But in Bohemia and in Bavaria, the French armies crumbled to pieces. In December, 1742, Belle-Isle saved only about 13,000 men from the occupation of Prague.

By that time, however, his protectress had been dead more than a year.

4

After the death of the Princess de Conti, the King purchased her fine country seat Choisi, on the Seine;

it was famous for its terrace overlooking the river, and for the eight marble statues in its garden, which had been carved at the order of Fouquet in imitation of ancient sculpture.

The King gave this château to his favorite as a residence. It was furnished with the most beautiful mirrors, and sculpture, and equipped with discreet corridors and secret doors. It was situated at the foot of a hill, protected from the wind, near the forest of Sénart. The King himself supervised the decoration, had trees planted in the garden and had others removed for the sake of the view. Here, Félicité de Vintimille kept the King away from the atmosphere of the Court; never was he in Versailles more than one whole day in a week; he saw the Cardinal for a quarter of an hour during a week. And here the energetic young woman tried to teach her King to have a will of his own, to make him keep an eye on domestic affairs, to enable him by this introductory schooling to keep a watchful eye on affairs of state. For Félicité it meant a step in this direction when the King dismissed a cup-bearer who stole his champagne. She even tried to free him from the guardianship of Bachélier, and dared to ask him: "Sire, are you going to tell this, too, to your valet?"

It was her intention to overthrow the Cardinal and to supplant his régime by another which would be more sensible and energetic. She induced the King to work, to become interested in current affairs. For herself she had independent mental interests, poor as French soil was for these. Her correspondence with Madame du Deffand reveals an enthusiasm for the wit of this lady, and the intellectual life she represented, which is surprising in so calculating a young person. She is enamored of Madame du Deffand's letters. She is "transposed into a dream world" when she gets one, and longs to get acquainted with her circle: "You speak to me of Madame du Châtelet. I am dying to see her. Now that you describe her to me, I am bound to know her as she is. I am grateful to you for telling me what you think; it is a pleasure to me to have your guidance. I will try to meet her and then the King of Prussia shall be the theme of

our conversation, if she will do me the honor of listening to me; for I am afraid that she will find me stupid."

Madame de Vintimille was in the eighth month of her pregnancy when she was seized with a fever, for which the physicians of that time could recommend nothing but blood-letting—three times a day. As it was absolutely essential that the King go to Versailles, he left her in Choisi, in the company of her sister, two noblemen and the Duke d'Ayen (who, according to her husband and d'Argenson, was her second-string lover); he asked Madame de Mailly during the three days of his necessary stay in Versailles, to keep him posted four times daily and by express messengers, as to the patient's condition.

Upon his return the King told her that he was going to give her the residence the Duke and Duchess of Fleury had occupied until then. She hoped to feel strong enough to take possession of the apartment the following week. But the fever would not abate. Her mood was sometimes irritable, sometimes deeply melancholy.

She arrived in Versailles with a great following of friends and admirers, and the King dined every night in her room.

On September first she gave birth to a son. On the eighth she was suddenly taken with so severe a pain that she thought she had been poisoned. The next morning she died. The body was opened by physicians, poorly stitched up again, left naked in the bedroom, where anyone could enter. As no dead body was permitted to remain in a royal palace, it was removed to the corner of a coach-house where it remained until it did not present a human appearance, while the face still had the distortion of her death spasm. The mob of Versailles mocked the poor body with that contempt which it often shows for illicit love, and which it showed for all Louis XV's mistresses.

5

The shock of this sudden death, and the indignities heaped upon the helpless corpse, induced the King to

see in the occurrence a penalty for his sins, proof of an avenging God. He feared Divine retribution; he cowered at the thought of Hell; surely when he died it would open its jaws to swallow him. At first it was in vain that Madame de Mailly assured him that Hell was a nursery-tale. He wept a great deal, constantly had the word religion on his lips, and tried to live with Madame de Mailly as brother and sister. He did not succeed. As the good and tender comforter she was, Louise de Mailly now held a new attraction for him. He was moved by the tears she shed at the death of her sister. He resolved to keep her near him always, and for that purpose he had an apartment furnished in Versailles, right above his little gallery, under the pretense of preparing new quarters for the Count de Meuse.

Here the King and his favorite led the strangest existence, a life of remorse and desire, of tears seasoned with kisses. Some days he fasted, as a sort of atonement for the nightly indulgences; when embracing Madame de Mailly, he had death and burial constantly on his lips, while she wept with him.

Every evening his grief was more assuaged and his respect for Louise de Mailly increased. She had learned from her younger sister to be independent. She continued the political schemes of the deceased. The Cardinal detested Belle-Isle and spoke so contemptuously of him that, on his return from Germany, where it is true he had accomplished but little, the Marshal was received with extreme coldness, not only by the Cardinal, but also by the King and the courtiers. He protested and proffered his resignation. But Madame de Mailly did not give in, she used her influence in every possible place, and succeeded in changing the King's mind so completely that in May, 1743, he raised Belle-Isle to the rank of Duke.

Louise de Mailly had a big heart; she spared herself no pains to help those whom she liked; it was painful to her to see anyone insulted by the silence the King nearly always kept, and she astonished the entire Court by inducing the King to speak a few

words to those to whom he so far had been cold. And Madame de Mailly rejoiced over everyone who was content with his King.

However, while her better side was developing this way and her star was apparently in the ascendant, the King began to tire of her tête-à-têtes. He was bored with this woman whom he had scorned once before, and who became visibly older day by day.

But he had not sufficient energy to tear himself away and, as was his habit, he showed his weariness only by malicious digs. It was about that time that the smartest and shrewdest courtier of the epoch induced the final break with England.

While Madame de Mailly was under the influence of the Princess de Charolais, the latter had constantly warned her of the Duke of Richelieu. The few times he was invited for supper he made a deep impression upon His Majesty, partly by his wit, partly by reputation as a successful gallant. The Princess de Charolais whose love he had accepted some time ago, and then scorned, again accepted and then completely forgotten, harbored a deep hatred for him because he had held her favor so lightly. She succeeded in persuading Madame de Mailly that no one of the King's associates could become more dangerous to her than this man who had made inconstancy his principle and faithlessness his obligation. Madame de Mailly, therefore, showed an icy coolness from the beginning, which it cost him a considerable effort to thaw and which for a long time stood in the way of his ambition. Now, returning to Court, he had a bitter prejudice against the favorite. He was firmly resolved to secure for the King another and younger mistress who would be absolutely devoted to the Duke, and with whom he could work in harmony.

6

Madame de Mailly had a younger sister, Marie-Anne de Mailly-Nesle, who in 1734, at the age of seventeen, had been married to the Marquis de la Tournelle, a pious nobleman who lived on his estate.

This estate had become very valuable, thanks to a canal engineered by the great Vauban.

Probably because de la Tournelle's young wife was bored in the country, he obtained a commission as a lieutenant-colonel in Condé's infantry regiment, through the influence of Madame de Mailly. At the first meeting with the young Marquise the King could not refrain from exclaiming: "Mon Dieu, how beautiful she is!" Her portrait, done by Nattier in 1740, brought fame to the painter and at the same time gave her the reputation of being the most beautiful lady in Versailles.

Marie-Anne's appearance at Court put the Cardinal in a state of the highest perturbation. He could cope with Madame de Mailly whose aim was to reign over the King's heart; but he feared the political influence Madame de la Tournelle might wield. The memoirs of the Duchess of Brancas give us a glimpse of this. The Duchess was an intimate friend of Richelieu, and Fleury all but cross-examined her to find out whether or not Richelieu was planning to put Madame de la Tournelle in the place of her sister. She denied any knowledge of it.

Richelieu was thinking of nothing else.

Madame de Mazarin, the aunt of the sisters, on her deathbed put Madame de la Tournelle and Madame de Flavacourt under the guardianship of Madame de Mailly. By her death the office of a lady-in-waiting to the Queen became vacant. Madame de la Tournelle applied for it, and her eldest sister supported her application. As was his habit, the Cardinal delayed a long time before mentioning the matter to the King; then he handed the King a list of the applicants, on which he had placed the name of Madame de la Tournelle last. The King took a pencil, wrote Madame de la Tournelle's name at the top of the list, and said: "The Queen is informed and will award the place to this lady." The Cardinal and the Minister Maurepas, wishing to prevent this appointment if possible, pointed out that Madame de Villars had been promised the appointment long before. But as that lady absolutely declined to enter a contest with the house of Nesle, the plan had to be dropped.

Young as Madame de la Tournelle was, she had three love-affairs behind her: one with Monsieur de la Trémoille, another with Monsieur de Soubise, and a third with the young Duke d'Agénois, for whom she still retained tender feelings. But her ambition was stronger than any erotic passion. The King fell head over heels in love with her, and had the Duke d'Agénois' letters opened by the police. One day he showed her a few letters which could not fail to lower the Duke in her esteem. The handsome young man, according to the carefully prepared plan of his uncle, Richelieu—who was also the uncle of the Nesle sisters—had been sent on an official journey to Languedoc. There, as the letters revealed, in the solitude of provincial life he had been responsive to a certain young lady's advances. The King put the letters of the faithful Agénois, as he called him, on the table before Madame de la Tournelle, exclaiming: "Ah! le beau billet qu'a la Châtre, voilà ce que m'envoie la poste!" The first half of this remark is a quotation: Ninon had given la Châtre at his request a written assurance of her fidelity. One day, during a tête-à-tête with one of his successors, she recalled la Châtre's certificate of fidelity and laughingly exclaimed: "Le beau billet," etc.

Madame de la Tournelle's appointment as lady-in-waiting did not necessarily make the position of her sister at Court impossible. But Richelieu and his party, in which Madame de Tencin was very active, were interested in depriving Madame de Mailly of her influential position to make it easier to remove her from Versailles forever. They played upon her credulity and allayed her suspicions; Madame de la Tournelle herself, as well as Madame de Flavacourt, assured her of the sisterly affection and absolutely unquestionable gratitude of the new favorite. The sisters appealed to her goodness, to her desire to do what the King would like best. If she would resign her position she could be sure of the King's infinite gratitude, she could retain his undying affection for a mistress who had shown herself equal to a sacrifice that proved the nobility of her soul.

They succeeded in persuading the poor, credulous

woman so completely that in a letter to Cardinal Fleury, the contents of which Richelieu and Madame de la Tournelle had talked over beforehand with the King, she renounced her position in favor of her sister, Madame de Flavacourt.

On September 20, 1742, the Court heard news: Madame de la Tournelle had succeeded Madame de Mazarin as lady-in-waiting to the Queen, and Madame de Mailly resigned her position, income and all, and without any compensation, in favor of Madame de Flavacourt.

Doubtless, Madame de Mailly had hoped that her sacrifice would mean so much to the King that she would not have to go away, that she would be allowed to live on in the palace near him.

7

The King, who had never known the least resistance from a woman, was surprised and annoyed by Madame de la Tournelle's calm reserve and her negative attitude. He wrote; she did not answer; he wrote again, and again received no answer. He was used to seeing women led before him like deer at the battues. At first he thought of favoring some one else. But this time he was caught. His impatience did no good. After every attempt to revolt he had to return, an ever more and more abject adorer. He felt consumed by unsatisfied desire. But Madame de la Tournelle was firmly resolved to make herself indispensable. She did not want to run the risk of being thrown aside, as her sister was now—by her own machinations. She treated the King about as Anne Boleyn, after the dismissal of her sister Mary Carey —had treated the King of England.

It can easily be understood what the elder sister suffered as witness of all these erotic skirmishes. She dined and supped alone with the King as usual; but the meals were extremely dismal. The King was either silent, or else made some remark that made her cry. Nevertheless she fancied she had won back Louis' favor. One day, however, he shattered her

illusions by telling her that he was madly in love with Madame de la Tournelle, that although he so far had not possessed her, he hoped to do so soon, and that therefore he could not love another any longer.

Deeply humiliated, but with the feeling that she never could do without her beloved, Madame de Mailly, kneeling, promised to be content with everything if she only were permitted to stay. The King replied unfeelingly that she must leave the palace that very day. She dragged herself after him, fell at his feet, and begged for a postponement, just a short postponement. If she were allowed to stay she would keep this new passion of his secret from his subjects. If they were to hear of it, it might decrease their respect. Moved, Louis consented, but permitted her to stay that one night only, and complained to Richelieu of that. Richelieu promised to arrange everything. He went to Madame de Mailly, made it plain to her how little she was considering her dignity if she clung to the King and the palace. He offered to accompany her to Paris if she wanted him to. She answered: "I shall make this sacrifice, though it kill me; I will go to Paris tonight."

We can read the letters Madame de la Tournelle wrote to her uncle Richelieu, after she had succeeded in driving away her sister. Her attitude is absolutely hard. She uses the most vulgar expressions: *"Sûrement Meuse vous aura mandé la peine que j'ai eue à faire déguerpir madame de Mailly."*

She describes how she still put the King off. As often as he expected to reach the goal of his desires, he saw himself disappointed.

"He has informed you that the matter between us was all arranged; in a letter of this morning he asks me to explain that this is an error; for he does not want you to think more happened than really did. It is true: at the time he wrote he imagined that it would happen that same night. But I have put certain obstacles in the way, for which I am not at all sorry."

She states her conditions. She wishes to be *maîtresse déclarée,* as Madame de Montespan had been under Louis XIV. She does not want a modest apart-

ment like Madame de Mailly, but a palace where she can receive the King "in a way worthy of him." Furthermore, she wants a country estate, an allowance of fifty thousand livres a month, diamonds worth five hundred thousand livres, the right to draw money from the state treasury, if necessary, and finally the title of duchess, acknowledged by Parliament. In case she should become pregnant, her condition should not be kept a secret and the child should be pronounced legitimate.

The King, always afraid of expenses, afraid of public opinion, afraid to make any decision at all, shied at these demands. But the favorite would make no compromise, affected indifference, spoke of returning to the Duke d'Agénois, insisting that the intercepted letters meant nothing more than a passing fancy, not real infidelity. At the same time she goaded the King's passion by clever coquetry.

The public was persuaded that she had capitulated long ago. She received through the mail all the scurrilous ballads which were sung in Paris about her and the King. Most of these verses can scarcely be quoted. We may cite one which merely says this: If the mob dares be shocked to see three sisters relieve each other, the Archbishop de Tencin would undoubtedly absolve their sins:

Si la canaille ose crier
De voir trois sœurs se relayer,
Au grand Tencin envoyez la,
Alléluia.

Apparently amused, Madame de la Tournelle herself sang this song to her guests.

Long before she gave the King any right over her person, he as well as she, had to stand all kinds of persecution. The Cardinal severely upbraided his former pupil, and showed him intercepted letters from Parisians, stating that: "The King is no longer loved as much as before." He appealed to his religious emotions, threatened him with God's ire. All in vain. Then the Cardinal saw the necessity of inducing Maurepas to let loose the flood of mocking ditties which he and his circle had manufactured;

they whistled about Madame de la Tournelle's ears like bullets. But nothing could move her, nor was there anything to make an impression upon the King, who was madly in love.

For a long time she let him languish in vain and scratch timidly at her door. He was not admitted until she felt perfectly sure of her power over him. The peace and cheerfulness which, in December, 1742, appeared on the bewildered face of the monarch was sufficient proof to the courtiers that Æneas and Dido had found each other in the grotto. From now on, Louis XV behaved like one in a giddy ecstasy. The affairs of France interested him even less than before. He has no room in his thoughts for the siege of Prague, nor for the defeats in Bavaria, nor for the state of his army. He rushed through the meetings of the Privy Council; he feasted on fine food and good wines. When his mistress wrote to her uncle, he added a wanton postscript of the kind that can be written, but not printed. Neither victories nor defeats mattered to him compared to the fact that Richelieu had sent trout from the Lake of Geneva, or an especially slimy anecdote.

Then, at the beginning of the year 1743, the ninety-year-old Cardinal de Fleury died, and the King, finally released from all guardianship, breathed freely. The favorite had moved to Versailles, and she gave the King what he needed: quiet. She could lie the whole day long on the chaise-longue, wrapped in thought, and nothing would bring her out of it.

One day she noticed that the King was ill-humored toward her. She could not imagine the cause. But she showed no curiosity. The reason for his ill-humor was that he had opened a letter from Richelieu to her which prescribed a plan for the favorite's conduct, hour by hour. Soon she noticed that Louis was becoming very self-conscious in his attitude toward her, and also that he was adopting a hostile view of the ambitious hopes of Richelieu. She said not a word about it, but refused to appear at the dinner-table, had her meals brought in from a restaurant—and that in the Palace of Versailles!—and refused the King's visits, as long as she was not in surroundings

worthy of his and her own positions. While she maintained this attitude, she showed an excellent knowledge of human nature, by humoring the King's desire to appear impenetrable. She was clever enough to feel him out and never to say anything derogatory about one he valued, nor fall out with anyone to whose company he was used. She kept a friendly attitude toward the Noailles family although they stuck faithfully to Madame de Mailly.

The King remained deeply in love. He gave Madame de la Tournelle the petname of "Princess" and was constantly in her and her sister's company. Madame de Flavacourt, to whom he was very partial, was given the petname of Poulette. She was unusually beautiful, cultivated a reserved manner, and answered every importunate compliment with an amazed, almost frightened expression.

The King liked the fourth sister still better, the recently married Duchesse de Lauraguais, a malicious gossip. Her appearance alone was enough to break up the boredom of the Court; being merry herself, she spread a contagious merriment about her. She had not the regal beauty of her sister but she was pretty and popular; not slender, but stout, with that lively, bursting health more typical of a woman of the middle class than of a duchess. Her sensuality was not of the inaccessible but of the broad kind. One day when she was chattering roguishly and wantonly, which smoothed every wrinkle from the King's brow, he fell into her open arms and forgot himself in her warm embrace. When she presided, the suppers were jollier than ever before. The King did not refrain from petty intimacies in the presence of company and soon it was rumored at Court that the King and the Duchesse de Lauraguais had found each other in a common caprice. One can easily imagine that all kinds of comments were made about the entrance of the fourth sister into the lists. This fourth, however, was not ambitious. A comfortable armchair, in which she could take it easy and talk scandal about her neighbor, was all she asked of life.

8

Marie-Anne was too proud and too clever to upbraid either the King or her sister for these incidents. She gave no sign of having noticed or heard anything about it. But this new incident had an unexpected effect upon her feelings. She began to fall in love with the King, and after some time she realized to her own surprise that she actually loved him. At the same moment she felt the passion in herself, it increased in the King. Marie-Anne took full possession of him, gave free play to all her whims. She provoked him, vexed him, resisted him, denied him admission to her room and her embraces, and won him back by showing him in a thousand different ways her beauty, whose charm could not be rivaled by the grosser attractions of her sister.

Nattier painted her a shining figure of Strength, with a tiger-skin around her shoulders and a cuirass over the fine, full breast: a young body with splendid, rippling white skin, with a shining forehead and a bewitching look in her big blue eyes, and with the smile of a child on her moist lips; her expression is at once passionate and tender.

The Minister Maurepas was the nucleus of the opposition to the favorite, and his envious old wife set all kinds of obstacles in the way of her advancement. But the King had no desire save to comply with all of Marie-Anne's wishes.

On the banks of the Indre river was the duchy of Châteauroux, whose fields brought an annual income of 85,000 livres. Some time back the King had bought it from his relative, the Count de Clermont, who had to pay debts. It was given for life to Madame de la Tournelle, who became Duchess of Châteauroux. As duchesses were entitled to a seat of honor in the Queen's Court, every new duchess was presented to her. This time the presentation took on a ceremonial air. There were eight ladies present, five of whom were sitting; among these the Duchess of Lauraguais. When the Duchess of Châteauroux stepped from the King's chambers to take her place before the Queen,

Maria Leszczinska said to her: "Madame, I congratulate you upon the favor bestowed upon you by the King."

The patent of nobility, which Maurepas was compelled to make out, reads in part:

"Because of these reasons, and because Our dear and much beloved cousin, Marie-Anne de Mailly, widow of the Sieur Marquis de la Tournelle, is descended from one of the greatest and most famous houses of Our Kingdom, because she is related to Our House and to the oldest of Europe; further, because her ancestors have done great and important services to Our Crown for several centuries, because she herself is attached to the Queen, Our dear Wife, as lady-in-waiting, and because to these excellences she adds all the virtues and worthy qualities of mind and heart, which have brought her universal respect and esteem, We have found it fitting to bestow upon her by letters patent of October 21st ult. the duchy and peerage of Châteauroux in Berry, with all lands and all appurtenances . . ."

As a duchess, Marie-Anne had reached her immediate goal. To fortify her position, her uncle Richelieu worked with untiring zeal, in alliance with that genius of intrigue, Madame de Tencin. This lady was formerly a nun who had three pregnancies. Through her brother the Cardinal she obtained a papal letter releasing her from her vows and giving her the title of canoness. Richelieu had made her acquaintance when she came to Paris from Grenoble to give birth in secret to d'Alembert, and then abandon the child entirely. She sought recognition as his mother after d'Alembert became famous, but her son repudiated her. She developed into a politician who appreciated the value of men of letters in politics, and cultivated them assiduously. With her remarkably clever and adaptable brain she was able to talk from any point of view, according to her company. We have seen how highly Voltaire esteemed her. She had not only a sane mind, but one that was overfull of sanity, the result of a life unusually full of experience.

Madame de Tencin lived for her brother only. And Richelieu, she thought, was the only one who could

make her brother minister. She, therefore, attached herself to him, arranged his financial affairs, supervised his son's education, spied for him at Court and in town smoothed the way for him to the Queen, warned him of every threatening danger, warned him against giving way to old grudges, or to sudden impulses, kept her ears alert for his advantage, and informed him of any impending development such as the growing influence of the Bishop of Mirepoix over the King, which was so disastrous to Voltaire's application for membership in the Academy. It was she who pointed out to Richelieu how stupid it was to protect such a wicked person as Voltaire, just out of pure friendship and admiration for the Duchess of Châteauroux.

She was attached to Richelieu because of their mutual interests only. She distributed her favors impartially among a considerable number of friends; she had a passion only for her brother. She defended her relations with him by recalling the case of another brother and sister, the Duchess of Grammont and the Duke of Choiseul.

It was Madame de Tencin who first had the inspiration to make the Duchess of Châteauroux a political personality, an idea soon taken up by the favorite. Thus, without any hatred on her part, she crossed Voltaire's efforts, the great political problem that Amelot, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had laid on him. For a long time Amelot had hoped to make use of the friendship between Voltaire and the King of Prussia.

9

Very rarely in the history of the world has there been a friendship between a sovereign and a creative artist that gained fame for both.

In ancient times, Aristotle was Alexander's teacher, and Alexander sent him material for study from his campaigns. But he had no influence upon the philosopher.

Cæsar and Cicero were acquaintances. Cicero was Cæsar's political enemy, nevertheless Cæsar paid

homage to him as a literary figure and answered his attacks with chivalrous politeness; but neither was Cæsar indebted to Cicero for mental enrichment, nor Cicero to Cæsar.

In a later century the friendship between Goethe and Charles Augustus lasted from the early youth of both until the Prince's death. Goethe's friendship with the Duke of Weimar brought him an assured position, which in turn brought him many invaluable experiences. But he got no ideas from his prince. Charles Augustus was no genius, in spite of his great qualities.

More recently, there is the connection between Richard Wagner and Louis II. Wagner was indebted to King Louis for wealth and the leisure for work; but mentally the King exerted no influence upon the composer.

The friendship of Voltaire and Frederick the Great is unique. It was not perfectly harmonious. For the first fifteen years it was enthusiastic; then it was undermined and broke down under Voltaire's lack of restraint and Frederick's resentment. Later, the breach was healed and so remained.

This relationship shows the spirit of the eighteenth century. The king and the poet belonged to different worlds, even though they spoke the same language. Writer and king had genius, and they influenced one another.

When, in August, 1736, Voltaire received the first letter from Frederick, Crown Prince of Prussia, he was nearly forty-two years old. The writer of the letter was twenty-four. Voltaire was an international celebrity, and the most famous writer of the epoch. Frederick was a young prince, known only for what he had suffered.

He had suffered for his talents as Voltaire had for his wit and revolutionary leanings. Both had been victims of the brutality of the age and of the arbitrary power of the government.

Frederick's father, whom Carlyle has idealized, was in spite of his great abilities as an organizer, stubborn and hot-tempered, in spite of his sense of justice, rough and cruel. He had prescribed a plan for

his son's education, omitting everything unessential, such as Latin and literature. He hated anything foreign; if he permitted French it was because German at that time was scarcely regarded as a language. He liked to thrash his subjects personally on the street, when they had aroused his dissatisfaction by anything.

Because Frederick as a boy indulged in forbidden studies, made debts and showed no interest in military parades, his father wanted him to renounce the throne. When he refused, his father treated him with cruelty and sneered at him for a coward for putting up with it. In 1730, Frederick tried to flee to England. But an intercepted letter to his friend Katte betrayed the plan to the King. Again the Prince was cruelly maltreated and then tried before a court-martial, intended by his father to sentence him to death. Such was the style of the time. Twelve years before Peter the Great had his son flogged to death, and himself administered some of the lashes. As the Prussian court-martial was not blindly obedient, the King had to be content with having his son sent to Küstrin for imprisonment.

At the age of seventeen, Frederick had a love affair with the daughter of a teacher in Potsdam. He used to accompany her on the flute while she played the clavichord. The King had her led round the Potsdamer Platz and publicly whipped before the eyes of the Prince.

In Küstrin, Frederick's friend Katte, because he was an accomplice in the plan to flee, was decapitated under the Prince's window, so close that Frederick could give him his hand in farewell.

10

In his first letters Frederick approaches Voltaire with deep devotion and gratitude: Voltaire's works (he says) convey a wealth of spirit. At every rereading they appear new. He is so great that by the sheer force of his personality he decides the issue as to whether ancient or modern literature is the

better. There is nobody in Europe who cannot learn from Voltaire. He hopes Voltaire will not find him unworthy of his instruction, unimportant as he is; for what does high birth amount to beside genius!

Voltaire, surprised by such an ovation from the son of a King, answers gladly from Cirey: So there actually was an heir to a throne, who could appreciate his ideas! A man like Frederick should be able to establish the golden age in his empire and rise above royal dignity to humanity.

Frederick answers: Is it possible that the same Voltaire to whom our hands build altars and statues, is thrust aside in his fatherland! This is a paradox, a puzzle. Voltaire has no fault but that of being superior to other people. If Frederick should ever get to France, his first question would be: Where is Monsieur de Voltaire? King, Court, Paris, Versailles, women, amusements—none of these things would make his journey worth while.

They share constant allusions to classical antiquity. Frederick calls Voltaire Apollo or Socrates, while Voltaire calls Frederick Trajan or Titus. He combines Vergil's talents with the virtues of Augustus.

Frederick explains in rhyme: The verse in which you mention my name will bring me immortality. Without you the name would get no more than a place on the genealogical table.

The young Prince was in the habit of writing French verses every day. Now he sent them to Voltaire to be returned corrected. For a foreigner he had an admirable command of French; but his artistic culture was not high enough to enable him to realize the absurdity of hoping to be a lyric poet in another language than his own; he was still less aware that although he was an excellent speaker he was not a poet at all. In the odes, by which, as Voltaire says in his letters, "His Royal Highness condescended to embellish French poetry," he gives "amitié" four syllables, instead of three, "carrière" three instead of four, and "tête" rhymes with "trompette." His spelling was outrageous.

The delivery of these letters was so slow that Frederick considered it incomprehensibly fast, when a

letter of April 17 reached him on May 9. Two virile intellects are revealed in them. It is not surprising that Voltaire appears to be superior to the young man at the beginning. But a year and a half later there occurs a case of conflicting opinions in which Frederick proves to be the more unprejudiced and logical thinker. This was the discussion of Wolff's conclusions on the question of free will.

Voltaire's letters are less outstanding for his wit, which became so famous, than for clearness, logic, and a charm which is the charm of strength.

From the first, the Prince wished to make the personal acquaintance of Voltaire. But the latter felt tied to Cirey and its mistress:

"I would regard it a priceless piece of luck to pay my respects to Your Royal Highness. One travels to Rome to see churches, paintings, ruins and basreliefs. A Prince like yourself deserves a far longer journey; he is a far greater rarity. But I cannot abuse the friendship of the one whom I have to thank for the hospitable refuge where I now am, by forsaking it to make this excursion. You doubtless think like Julian, that great man so unjustly maligned, that friends should always be preferred to kings."

Frederick sends presents: a cane with a gold knob, carved with a head of Socrates; his own portrait, which he ordered the moment Voltaire expressed a desire to own it; a valuable writing stand, accompanied by verses, to the Marquise du Châtelet. From Rheinsberg he sends his friend, Monsieur de Kaiserling, to Cirey, to pay the Prince's respects to the goddess of the town; he told his friend that this enchantress possessed all the gifts of the mind, and spent her time in searching for the truth. In reality Frederick could not abide her, as she stood in the way of his wishes: "Please tell Madame Marquise du Châtelet that she is the only one to whom I should be content to leave Monsieur de Voltaire, for she alone is worthy of possessing him."

Madame du Châtelet pointed out that the Prince so cruelly treated by his father, was not King as yet, and therefore not his own master. "When he becomes

King, we shall both go and visit him." This plan was never carried out.

In the year 1736, Voltaire succeeded in procuring for his protégé Thiriot the position of correspondent to the Prussian Crown Prince. Thiriot scrupulously sent all Parisian news of the day, including all malicious and spiteful pamphlets directed against Voltaire. When Madame du Châtelet learned of this, she could not refrain from writing the Crown Prince an angry letter to warn him of this pretended friend of Voltaire, who aroused her deep mistrust.

11

On May 31, 1740, Frederick became King. At last he was free to entertain anybody and to see Voltaire. This delighted him, busy as he was right after his accession. He made his debut as a true pupil of Voltaire: he abolished torture, and did away with the cruel poaching laws. He disbanded the Palace guard of giants, which his father had recruited, shanghaied or purchased at a high price. He recalled Wolff who had been expelled from Germany, and made him a Professor in the University at Halle.

The first meeting of the two men is agreed upon. Frederick is to see those clever hands, those clear eyes, kiss those eloquent lips:

> Je baiserai cent fois cette bouche, éloquente
> Dans le sérieux et le badin,
> Dont la voix, folâtre et touchante,
> Va du cothurne au brodequin
> Toujours enchanteresse et toujours plus charmante.

Voltaire was in the Netherlands, busy publishing Frederick's book *Anti-Machiavelli,* in which strictly honest politics were defended. The King did not live up to his book which was meant as an attack on the French minister, Cardinal Fleury.

Voltaire asks the King to bring drops along for him, as he surely would faint from joy. Frederick writes: "It will be the most wonderful day of my life; I believe I shall die from it."

Frederick was stricken with chills; the place of meeting had to be changed, and Voltaire had to travel to him.

At Moyland Castle, near Cleves, he was led through several empty halls to a bare room, where on a bed, covered with a riding coat, lay a little man. It was Frederick. The fever was cured by his emotion. From the eleventh to the fourteenth of September the two great men were together for the first time. One might have anticipated a little disappointment on Frederick's part. But a week later he writes to Jordan:

"So, I have seen this Voltaire, whom I was so anxious to know. I was suffering from chills and fever and my soul was as affected, as my body was weakened. But with people of his type one must not be ill; one has to feel even better than normal. He has the eloquence of Cicero, the gentleness of Pliny, and the wisdom of Agrippa. He unites the virtues of the three greatest men of ancient times. (Frederick knew no more about classical antiquity, than to think of Cicero, Pliny and Agrippa as its three greatest men.) His mind is at work continuously. Each drop of ink from his pen is a spark of his spirit. . . . Madame du Châtelet is to be envied his possession."

At various times, but always in vain, Voltaire had tried to win membership in the French Academy. He tried especially hard in 1732. He did not get even half of the votes. A member of the Academy, entirely forgotten today, who at the age of twenty-seven was permanent secretary at *l'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres,* Claude Gros de Boze, declared on that occasion that beyond question Voltaire could never become a member. Foreign countries were already of a different opinion. D'Alembert tells of an Academy member who traveled in Germany and informed the sovereign that Voltaire had no seat in the French Academy, and received the answer: "Who then *is* in it?"

When the death of Cardinal de Fleury created a vacancy, Voltaire applied ambitiously for the seat, wrote all kinds of letters, in which he insisted that he was a good Catholic, that he did not know what

these *Lettres Philosophiques* were, that people ascribed to him. He denied that he had ever published a book of that title—an attitude which was not at all in accordance with Frederick's taste. But it was well known that nobody was admitted to the Academy who was a Jansenist or a freethinker. The first Voltaire could deny without difficulty; but the latter was less easy to disprove.

However, it seemed self-evident that he ought to be in the French Academy. King Louis gave his consent, apparently at the instance of Madame de Châteauroux who, in turn, was influenced by Richelieu. But he could withdraw this consent, and this was to be brought about by means of intrigues.

In his *Memoires pour servir â l'histoire de M. de Voltaire,* he himself tells bitterly the course of that affair, in the following words:

"An old ass by the name of Boyer, the Dauphin's tutor, a former Theatine, later Bishop of Mirepoix, took it upon himself to support the caprice of Monsieur Maurepas. To this Boyer the King left all matters concerning the clergy. This matter he construed as one which belonged to ecclesiastical discipline. He explained to the King that it was blasphemy for a man like myself to succeed a cardinal. I knew that Maurepas was behind it all. I went to see the minister and told him: 'A seat in the Academy is not an important honor, but it is nevertheless distressing to be excluded from it, after one had been proposed. You are opposing Madame de Châteauroux, who is loved by the King, and the Maréchal de Richelieu, who guides her. What connection is there, I ask you, between your quarrels and a seat in the French Academy? I implore you to answer me frankly. In case Madame de Châteauroux should prove to be more influential than the Bishop of Mirepoix, would you still resist me?' He thought for a moment, then he said: 'Yes, I shall destroy you.' "

True, the King had given Voltaire his consent; but Richelieu was induced by Madame de Tencin to change his mind, and the wind, therefore, shifted. The Bishop of Bayeux, a gracious prelate whose nearest claim to literary prestige was the fact that he had

charge of a little provincial academy in the city of Caen, was urged to apply for the vacant seat; he was elected unanimously on March 22, 1742.

As one can imagine, Voltaire was highly incensed, and so was Frederick. He wrote: "To be sure, I am not surprised that Voltaire should lose out before a court composed of nothing but Midases equipped with the crooks and mitres of a bishop and the ears of a jackass. Learn to despise a nation that disregards real worth . . . and come to a country where you are invited and where there is no bigotry."

This was not the only defeat Voltaire suffered in these days. Crébillon, senior, the censor, having aspirations himself in the field of tragedy, had prohibited the performance of *Mahomet,* and now, in 1743, he also forbade the performance of the play *La Mort de César,* as Voltaire says, "because Brutus should not have killed César, and in that he is incontestably right, for no one should kill anybody." (Nevertheless, the play was performed several months later, perhaps through the efforts of Madame du Châtelet.)

But this last prohibition matured Voltaire's desire to leave the field of battle. Many years before (in August, 1735) pupils of the Collège d'Harcourt had performed the innocuous play *La Mort de César.* And King Frederick had it performed. Voltaire writes to Cideville: "As he has bestowed upon me the compliment of producing *Julius César* at one of his country-seats, it is only natural that to please him I am leaving these West Goths who cannot see their way to performing the play in France."

It became an idée fixé with Frederick to have Voltaire with him daily. Hearing of the annoyances Voltaire had to suffer on French soil, he wrote jubilantly to his friend Jordan: "I believe Voltaire will now leave France for ever." And later, in June, 1743, he wrote these verses:

Paris et la belle Emilie
A la fin ont pourtant eu tort;
Boyer avec l'Académie
Ont, malgré sa palinodie,
De Voltaire fixé le sort.
Berlin, quoi qu'il puisse nous dire,
A bien prendre, est son pis-aller.

Mais qu'importe? Il nous fera rire
Lorsque nous l'entendrons parler
De Maurepas et de Boyer
Plein du venin de la satire.

Madame du Châtelet was very sad when Voltaire departed; she always suffered from his absence; but this time she was especially fearful of the temptations which the King of Prussia would offer him. On June 28, 1743, she writes to d'Argental:

"He has gone to Holland, whence he will probably proceed to Prussia. This is the basis of all my fears. For the King of Prussia is for me a very dangerous rival. I am enormously grieved, and although I feel that he is doing a certain wrong—for, in his place I would not have gone—my innermost feeling is one of anxiety. I have remained here in the hope of making possible the production of *César* and thus hastening his return; I doubt, however, that I shall succeed, and in that case I shall depart for Brussels, where he has promised to meet me."

12

As badly as Voltaire was treated, his prestige gained by the friendship and open admiration of the King of Prussia. For the old days were gone, when the France of Louis XIV dominated Europe by the threat of its commanders and armies. A number of defeats like that at Dettingen had made France's armies a laughing-stock in Europe, and French politics became a standing joke.

Outside of France, Louis the Much-Beloved was simply disregarded; on the other hand, everybody's attention was focused upon the King of Prussia. Each of the powers was trying to win him over; the British made efforts to keep alive his dislike of France.

For France, which had proved unable either to hold its former allies or to win new ones, it would have meant a great advantage to attain an alliance with this King whose name was a byword for beneficent power. He was Voltaire's hero, but in turn Voltaire was his idol. It, therefore, seemed to be worth

while trying to make use of the poet as secret diplomat.

Voltaire had always cherished the hope of winning the Prussian King for France. One can see that from the answer which Frederick sent him from Potsdam on August 20, 1743:

"The description you give of France is painted in pretty colors. But, say whatever you like, an army that runs away for three years in succession and is defeated everywhere it shows its face, is certainly not a troop of Cæsars or Alexanders."

The Ministry in France, then, resolved to make use of Voltaire's contact with Frederick. Count d'Argenson was always favorable to Voltaire, and Richelieu was even more active in furthering the matter. Madame de Châteauroux was easily won over, and through her the King. At the same time that the clerical party was celebrating its triumph over Voltaire, he was leaving Paris with secret instructions from the Foreign Minister, Amelot. His object was to make clear to Frederick the danger that threatened him from Austria, which had recently attacked France, and to induce him, if possible, to come to the aid of France by sending one hundred thousand men to Silesia. Voltaire says of this in his *Memoirs*:

"Some pretext was necessary. For that I took my quarrel with the former Bishop of Mirepoix. The King gave his consent. So I wrote to the King of Prussia that I could no longer endure the persecutions of the Theatine, and that I wished to find refuge with a philosophical King, in order to escape the chicaneries of a dull pious bishop. As this prelate always signs his name *anc. évèq. de Mirepoix* (instead of ancien évèque), we made great sport of changing the *anc.* to *âne.*

"The King of Prussia, who never lets a chance go by to take a crack at monks and court prelates, answered with a deluge of jokes about the jackass Mirepoix, and told me to come ahead. I arranged that the Minister would read every letter and every answer (Voltaire apparently has no feeling that he is abusing Frederick's friendship or that he is demeaning himself to a sort of espionage). The Bishop was informed.

He complained to Louis XV that I, as he said, made him out before foreign courts as a block-head. The King answered that this was a matter agreed upon, that he should not worry about."

As a reward Voltaire made the condition that his cousin Marchand should become army purveyor of food and uniforms. Of course, he received his share, such as the brothers Pâris had already given him from the large contracts for food which he procured for them. When, later on, the Minister d'Argenson wished to give the office to a certain Monsieur de Vallat, Madame du Châtelet wrote in Voltaire's absence (August 28, 1743) to Count d'Argenson and adjusted the matter.

Voltaire at first went to The Hague, where he lived in the palace of the King of Prussia. Count von Podewils, the Prussian Ambassador in Holland, was his host. This count, young, handsome, and loved by a young woman who was the wife of an influential official of the States-General, received from his mistress copies of the secret agreements of all states hostile to France. Voltaire had them copied and directed them to the French Foreign Ministry. Thus he was able to give exact information about military expenses and strength of troops of the Dutch Republic—matters which nobody in France knew. To please Madame du Châtelet and to flatter her discretion, he sent all letters and packages through her hands.

Voltaire wrote to Frederick, who had formed a very poor opinion of the French after the battle at Dettingen: "It does not seem that the French were lacking courage. Two hundred and fifty musketeers broke through five English squares, and yielded only when dying; the greater number of dead and injured noblemen gives indubitable proof of bravery. What couldn't this nation do, if commanded by a Prince like you!"

Nevertheless, the King was not persuaded of the military virtues of the French army.

It would have been helpful to Voltaire's plans had he been able to turn the King of Prussia against Holland and bring about dissention with the States-Gen-

eral, which were secretly transporting munitions through Prussian territory; but here he met the most stubborn resistance on the part of the Prussian Ambassador. For, in the event of a break with Holland, he would have been called home at once from The Hague, and at no price would Count von Podewils leave his beloved. Upon such circumstances was the fate of an empire dependent.

Voltaire had not the slightest scruple about opening Frederick's letters before people for whom they certainly were not intended. Frederick, on the other hand, from pure love and admiration, had no more hesitation about misusing Voltaire's letters.

Frederick wrote to the Prussian Ambassador to Versailles, Count de Rottembourg: "Enclosed I am sending you part of a letter from Voltaire, which I ask you to get into the hands of the Bishop de Mirepoix in some secret way, without involving yourself or me in the matter. My intention is to cause Voltaire to break with France, so that there would be nothing left for him to do but to come to us."

Both parties were too clever to be fooled. Voltaire was not long in discovering that Frederick had delivered him to his enemy. Frederick wrote to Count de Rottembourg on October 14: "Voltaire has, I don't know how, found out the little trick which we have played upon him, and is very cross about it; he will get over it, I trust."

Voltaire wrote to the Minister Amelot:

"He wrote me several letters about the man whom we were using as our pretext (the Bishop de Mirepoix) and I addressed some to him, which were written with the same frankness. In his notes as well as in mine there are several daring verses, which cannot hurt a King but can hurt a private person. He presumed that, if I were to have a serious quarrel with the man who was the butt of these jokes, I should be forced to accept his invitation, which so far I have declined, to come and live in the Prussian Court. But I swear to you that I would rather live in a Swiss town than enjoy the favor of a King who is liable to mix friendship with treason."

In reality the time was still remote when Voltaire

would prefer Ferney to a stay in Berlin, and Voltaire's grudge was really not deep. He was quite happy in Frederick's company.

13

From August 30 until October 12, Voltaire stayed in Berlin.

Frederick pretended he could see no possibility of an alliance between Versailles and Potsdam: He has, he says, no confidence. He knows what the French ambassador in Mainz has proposed: Peace with the Queen of Hungary, reëstablishment of the Emperor and compensation at Prussia's expense.—Voltaire answers that this was a rumor spread by Austria in order to prevent an alliance of the two powers. "Weren't you misrepresented in the same way last May? Was it not written to Holland that you were proposing an alliance with the Queen of Hungary against France?"—"I swear to you," replies Frederick (but, writes Voltaire, "with averted eyes") "that nothing is further from the truth."—"Very well, Sire, but why not simply make an alliance with France and the Emperor against the common enemy who hates and slanders us both with the same passion? What other ally can you get except France?"

To make his decision, Frederick had, as he said, to assure himself first of the coöperation of several of the princes of the Empire; so he set out for Bayreuth, accompanied by Voltaire. Before the departure the negotiations between the poet and the King were continued, sometimes on the same sheet of paper which passed from room to room in the castle. A curious example is the sheet of September, which Voltaire in October sent to the Foreign Ministry. It contains nine detailed questions and nine sharp answers mostly in the negative. One can see from these answers, that Frederick had been advised to be on his guard; somebody has informed him that under the mask of friendship he had been cherishing a spy at his bosom. That "somebody" was probably the French ambassador in Berlin, Monsieur de Valori himself, whom Vol-

taire, of course, was supposed to support, but whom he gave no place in his schemes. Here are a few of the questions and answers:

(Voltaire)

Is it not clear that the party of peace will infallibly be the victor in Holland? . . . Is it not clear that France shows strength and prudence?

Would you not bring immortal glory upon yourself by simply proclaiming yourself the protector of the Empire? Is it not to your highest interest to prevent the English from setting up your enemy, the grand-duke, as head of the Holy Roman Empire?

Anyone who has talked for as much as one quarter of an hour with the Duke of Aremberg, to Count von Harrach, Lord Stair, with anyone from Austria, has heard them say that they are burning to invade Silesia. Have you, then, Sire, another ally than France?

Whichever part Your Majesty may take, will you honor me with your confidence as one who desires to spend his days at your court? May I have the distinction of accompanying you to Bayreuth? I must know in time, however, in order to prepare myself for the journey. . . .

If Your Majesty . . . will make me the bearer of some pleasant information to my court, I implore you to give me this order.

(Frederick)

I admire France's prudence; but may God save me from imitating it!

France is more interested than Prussia in preventing that; and, my dear Voltaire, on this point your information is faulty. The Emperor cannot be elected without the unanimous vote of the princess, and so, as you can see, the election still depends on me.

Let them come; they shall have a warm reception:

On les y recevra, biribi
A la façon de Barbari
Mon ami.

If you wish to come to Bayreuth, I shall be glad to see you there, provided that the journey will not injure your health. It is, therefore, up to you to make the preparations you think best.

I am not in communication with France; I have nothing to hope nor to fear from it. If you wish, I will write a compliment to Louis XV which will contain not one true word. But, politically, we have nothing in common,

(Voltaire)	(Frederick)
	and it is not up to me to speak first. When I am asked something, there is still time to answer. . . .
Do what you will, I love Your Majesty with my whole heart. V.	I love you with my whole heart; I respect you; I shall do everything to get possession of you, barring actions that would make me ridiculous and be prejudicial to my interests and be out of keeping with my honor. . . . The French monarchy is a strong body without soul or nerve. F.

Voltaire had only introduced the problem to sound out the feeling of the King of Prussia. It is obvious that he had not full power to form an alliance. According to its phrasing, Frederick's answer contained only a mocking rejection of the alliance plans. If, however, his words are studied more minutely, it can be seen that what he wants most is, not to take the first formal step himself, but to receive an offer that would serve as the basis of a discussion. In the contrary event he would make himself "ridiculous." It could therefore be seen in advance that the negotiations which Voltaire had started by his near relationship to the King, could without difficulty be pursued by a personage who was at the source of power —a personage such as the Duchess de Châteauroux.

14

At his earlier stay in Rheinsberg, while Frederick was Crown Prince, Voltaire had made the acquaintance of Frederick's sister, the Margravine of Bayreuth, and had received a most favorable impression of this bright, highly gifted lady.

In thanks for a little gift she had sent him he had written her on December 26, 1741: "I shall never cease, Madame, to look back with longing on the days when I had the honor of paying my respects to you

in quiet Rheinsberg. The goodness with which the Margrave flattered me is ever in my mind, and what I wish is, just once more in my life, to partake of the same honor."

In Bayreuth, then, he was welcomed as an old friend. The Margravine Frederica Wilhelmina, whose memoirs inform us of her father's cruelty and of her own sad youth, had had built a little one-story castle about a half mile out of the city. It was called the Hermitage. Its rooms were marble, even the concert-hall was of white and green marble with a fricze, on which the most beautiful ladies of that age were portrayed. Her bedroom was panelled with rare Japanese woods. From the windows one could overlook romantically planned gardens. The mistress of the house was not romantic but she honored Voltaire and sat up at night to copy from his manuscript of *La Pucelle*. During the fortnight Voltaire was there, there were fêtes arranged in his honor; operas were sung and comedies played, hunts were planned and suppers arranged.

Before the poet's return to Berlin, Frederick, within the short time of four days, had a pretty hall in his castle transformed into a theater in order to play in it an opera Voltaire wished to hear. Princes and Princesses from the vicinity assembled and Voltaire was idolized and pampered by all of them. Frederick's young sister, the charming Ulrike Eleonore, later the mother of Gustave III of Sweden, began a real flirtation with him. He was not backward in playing his part, either, as can be seen from the free language of the following delightful humorous rhymes:

Souvent un peu de vérité
Se mêle au plus grossier mensonge.
Cette nuit dans l'erreur d'un songe
Au rang des rois j'étais monté;
Je vous aimais, princesse, et j'osais vous le dire,
Les dieux à mon réveil ne m'ont pas tout ôté;
Je n'ai perdu que mon empire.

That the Princess was not offended by the boldness of the poet is best shown by her attempt to put her answer into verse, a reward at the execution of which her brother most certainly helped her. She

writes that when Voltaire is in Berlin, his only thought is of his Emily and thus Ulrike becomes by illusion his queen of beauty. Doubtless he, too, felt the difference between himself and Emily, on one hand, and the Princess on the other:

Au haut de 'Hélicon vous vous placez vous-même:
Moi, je dois tout à mes aïeux,
Tel est l'arrêt du sort suprême.
Le hasard fait les rois, la vertu fait les dieux.

Voltaire never lost sight of Ulrike Eleonore. One of his sweetest and most meditative poems is the one he addressed to her when she was Princess of Sweden. It points out the stupidity of those who trifle away their time in playing. The poem ends with the classic verse:

S'occuper c'est savoir jouir:
L'oisiveté pèse et tourmente.
L'âme est un feu qu'il faut nourrir
Et qui s'éteint s'il ne s'augmente.

While the poems to the Princess show Voltaire at his best as an elegant epigrammatist, there is a poem he wrote to Frederick in those same days which reveals the future Voltaire, the champion of the forsaken, the neglected, the pitiable—one of the many poems which do credit to his great heart.

In the prison of Spandau there was an old nobleman from Franche-Comté, a man over six feet tall, whom Frederick William I had kidnapped because of his height. He had been promised a position as chamberlain, but the King's mania made him a simple guard. The poor conscript tried to desert, but was caught and taken before the King. He was foolish enough to tell him to his face that he was sorry he had not killed such a tyrant. His nose and ears were cut off, he was made to run the gantlet thirty-six times, and then was sent to Spandau to trundle a wheel-barrow.

Frederick refused to let his own mother intercede for this prisoner. Voltaire addressed to him the poem which starts:

Génie universel, âme sensible et ferme,
Grand homme, il est sous vous des malheureux mortels;
Mais quand à ses vertus on n'a point mis de terme,
On en met aux tourments des plus grands criminels.

So Frederick, who was gracious, but not sentimental, allowed the old man to be taken to a hospital, with a pension of five sous a day. When the time came for them to part, the King said to Voltaire: "Choose yourself an apartment or a house, decide what necessities and what luxuries you want in your life; state your conditions in such a way that you will be made happy by the fulfillment of them, and leave the rest to me."

The parting was not without emotion on both sides. Voltaire's resentment at the harmless and really flattering "betrayal," and Frederick's discomfort in suspecting he was being spied upon, were forgotten.

Voltaire went to Brunswick, where the Duke gave him a hearty reception, and then to Brussels, where Madame du Châtelet awaited him impatiently and with open arms.

15

Madame de Tencin made every effort to win Prussia's recognition of the political importance of Madame de Châteauroux. According to her plan, the Duchess was to take Voltaire's place in Frederick the Great's confidence. The King was to be persuaded that the Duchess's influence was not only greater than Voltaire's, but that it was decisive in France.

Frederick in his *Histoire de mon temps* (Vol. 3, chap. 4) says that he decided in 1743 not to use his ambassador at the French Court, the Baron de Chambrier; instead he wished to send Count de Rottembourg, a noble gentleman, who, in 1740, had gone from French into Prussian service. He was more adaptable and active, and besides was related to all the prominent personages of that Court: "So Count de Rottembourg went to Versailles. His introduction was taken care of by Richelieu and the Duchess de Châteauroux."

Rottembourg carried a letter addressed to Riche-

lieu, in Frederick's own handwriting, telling him—what Frederick knew—that, if Louis XV were engaged in the occupation of Flanders in the next year, Prince Charles would cross the Rhine and invade Alsace. The only way to prevent this attempt at conquest, was for Frederick himself to invade Bohemia. He offered France an armed alliance, but on the condition that none of the present French Ministers were to be informed of this treaty which His Prussian Majesty desired to conclude between the two Kings, with Richelieu as the third party.

At once a council was held, attended by the King, the Duchess, and Richelieu. As the latter felt that he lacked the diplomatic knowledge essential to draw up such a treaty, he advised Louis to consult also Marshal de Noailles and Cardinal de Tencin. The King of Prussia gave his consent, and from then on Count de Rottembourg worked with the Duchess de Châteauroux.

Frederick the Great had been clever enough to prepare the lady for this collaboration by a flattering letter; he asked her opinion as to how his envoy could best introduce the matter to the King of France.

In June the treaty of alliance between Prussia and France was signed. Madame de Châteauroux had toiled to bring it about; what motivated her, however, was, less that she recognized the advantage of an alliance with the great Frederick, than that by agreeing with his dislike and distrust of Amelot she could strike Maurepas. For in Maurepas she saw, with good reason, the personal enemy who had started the whole series of scurrilous ditties about her!

Proudly she received the following letter:

"*Potsdam,* May 12, 1744.

"Madame,

"It is very flattering for me, to be partly indebted to you for the inclination of the King of France, to tie between us the permanent bond of an everlasting alliance. The respect I have always had for you blends with my gratitude. In a word, Madame, I am persuaded that the King of France will never have to regret the step he has taken, and that this alliance will be of mutual advantage to both nations.

It is too bad that Prussia must ignore the debt of gratitude which it owes to you; in my heart, however, this feeling will remain deeply. I ask you to always be sure of this.

"Madame, your very devoted friend

"FREDERICK."

The Duchess answered with the following note:

"Sire,

"I am very happy that I may flatter myself as having contributed to the connection which I have established between you and the King. I am properly sensible to the proofs of the goodness which Your Majesty bestows upon me. I wish very deeply to find frequent occasion to prove my gratitude and the deep respect with which I have the honor to be

"Your Majesty's devoted and obedient servant

"MAILLY, DUCHESSE DE CHÂTEAUROUX."

16

Madame de Tencin had thought out a rôle for the Duchess de Châteauroux, which the latter took up eagerly. She was to be what Agnes Sorel had been to Charles VII—the mistress who made a man and a hero of a dull and listless king. She was to induce Louis XV to take command of his army.

The Duchess was now so sure of his favor that she could dare to displease him. She stirred the King's will, talked to him seriously, conversed with him about governmental affairs, about war and peace, and reminded him of his responsibilities, until he put his hand to his spinning head and cried: "You are killing me!"—"That is all the better, Sire, a king should celebrate his re-birth!"

The ambitious woman saw just one problem before her: to buckle on the King's armor and set him at the head of his troops, for the honor of his crown, and for the salvation of his people. She wished to appear as the better queen, as the rightful one; she wanted to smother the jeers under public rejoicing over victories which, as anybody could see, had been inspired by the Duchess of Châteauroux.

So Louis resolved to go to the army and the favorite was no less firmly resolved to follow him, if any way possible. She wrote at once to the commander-in-chief, Marshal de Noailles, and expressed her wish; she flattered him cleverly, and told him that the King was coming to the army; would it not be possible for her sister and herself to accompany the King—at least to follow him at a certain distance, so that they could get daily news of him? She informed him that she had asked the King's permission to write this letter, so the Marshal would not think that she was acting arbitrarily.

It was not easy for the old gentleman to answer; but it was as clear as day to him that the whole effect upon the population and upon the troops of having the King in their midst would be lost if his mistress were to accompany him. And the old soldier took courage and bravely risked the Royal disgrace by his answer: He did not believe it would be possible for the Duchess and her sister to follow the King to the army; she herself, of course, appreciates the difficulties, as she mentioned that she wished to settle in a town behind the frontier. It is true, that in the reign of the late King the Queen had undertaken such journeys and had remained with her attendants at a suitable distance; but he could not find a single precedent in favor of such a thing, and he could not refrain from remarking that it was essential for the King's as well as for her own sake, to name some sensible reason that would justify this step to public opinion. "You can see by my frankness, Madame, that I am speaking more as a true friend, than as courtier."

The Duchess answered at once with politeness and irony: She must immediately thank the Marshal for his letter, which was absolutely sensible and prudent; but she suffered from the colic, and for that illness the baths at Plombières were wonderful; she was in bad need of the cure.

Many who (like Minister Maurepas) wished for the King's departure for the army, hoped by that to separate him from the favorite, and so were opposed to her accompanying him. The popularity, which the

King's resolution had suddenly won him, gave Madame de Châteauroux food for thought. It would be unwise to overplay her cards. After the King had ordered the Queen, in spite of her begging, to remain in Versailles, he had to give the same order to the Duchess. Richelieu consoled her by telling her that Louis, being a man of strong habit, could not do without her long.

Meanwhile the whole month of May passed, and he did not call her. From one of her letters to Richelieu we can see that she was not only embarrassed by this, but also was very excited by something else she had found out: namely, that the King was in secret correspondence with her sister, Madame de Flavacourt, and that the latter was writing to him under a covering address. Letters in her handwriting were going to the valet Lebel.

A few days before his departure, the King had ogled Madame de Flavacourt, who had become more beautiful than the Duchess. His action was so open that it caught the Queen's attention; she had spoken to the young lady about it and asked if she were anything to the King. Madame de Flavacourt answered that the King's person had no special attraction for her; but she trembled lest she might be sent away from Court and have to live with her husband again.

17

The Duchess de Châteauroux, who knew from her own experience that one sister could supplant another and that the King's desire easily changed from one to another, felt it was of vital importance for her to get in personal touch with King Louis. She had shared his favor without anxiety with her sister Lauraguais. But this sister was not a beauty—just wanton and entirely devoted to her, and she was certainly not scheming to bring her down and to take her place. Madame de Flavacourt, on the other hand, was constantly entertaining members of the opponent's camp, and even enjoyed the confidence of the Queen.

In order to keep up appearances, it was essential

that one of the ladies-in-waiting of the Duchess set the example by departing first. The Duchess succeeded in persuading one of the Princesses of the royal family, the Duchess of Chartres; she departed for the army on the excuse that her husband had fallen from his horse. Thus, a precedent was furnished. Then Richelieu wrote to his niece that she could come, even without the King's order. He said that he would take all the responsibility. As soon as the sisters had said good-bye to the Queen (without mentioning, however, that they were going to Flanders) and had set out upon the journey, Richelieu informed the King of it; he spoke, in jesting and obscure hints, of a journey of the blind and disobedient Amor who surely deserved to be forgiven if only the blindfold had been removed from his eyes.

The ladies met the King in Lille where a building had been set aside for them, which was in direct connection with the royal quarters. They as well as Richelieu had tried their best to avoid any sensation, but the scandal in the little pious Flemish town grew to great dimensions. That the King no longer took his meals publicly, but dined with his mistress in the private chambers of the house next door, aroused more than the anger of the pious. In the camp the soldiers sang one ribald verse after another; even the Swiss Guard before the King's tent joined in singing the lines:

Ah madame Enroux!
Je deviendrai fou
Si je ne vous baise.

While other soldiers serenaded under the windows of the Duchess without disguising the name:

Belle Châteauroux!
Je deviendrai fou,
Si je ne vous baise.

In Paris, in the provinces, in the army, soon the only topic of conversation was the odd way in which the King was waging war. His living with the favorite in Lille was on everybody's lips.

The necessity for a temporary separation arose. The

King went off to the siege of Ypres and nine days later the city was taken. This quick surrender was greatly enjoyed by the Duchess, and after visiting several Flemish towns, the King again met her in Dunkerque.

But she would not leave him again, not even when the disquieting news came that Prince Charles had crossed the Rhine, and the King was forced to come to the aid of Alsace. Madame de Châteauroux followed him from town to town. Saint-Omer, Béthune, Arras, Péronne, La Fère, Laon, Reims, Chalons, Verdun became excited witnesses of their attachment. When the King (in the deepest incognito) went in and out of the Duchess's quarters, he could hear a chorus of mocking exclamations of leering enthusiasm: Long live the King! Long live the King!—And hastily he disappeared in some garden.

In Reims some unknown illness forced the Duchess to take to her bed. The physicians described her complaint as a sudden outbreak of fever; the courtiers saw in it an outbreak of remorse; the Duchess was persuaded that she had been given poison. Some ascribed the fever to her excitement at hearing that her former lover, the Duke of Agénois, had been fatally wounded.

The King postponed his departure from Reims one day, and then went to Metz where after a rapid recovery the Duchess caught up with him. Disregarding the curiosity of which they were the center, the King had a wooden bridge built between his quarters and the Duchess's; it was done with spectacular haste and deafening hammering in the abbey St. Arnould. Four streets were unwisely closed to the public while the connecting bridge was put up. The population of Metz was much incensed.

18

Suddenly—just when the King was celebrating his reunion with the lovable sisters—after a day spent with inspections of the fortress—after an evening in which many toasts had been drunk to the new ally,

the King of Prussia—after a night in which Richelieu had locked the King up with both sisters, Louis fell seriously ill.

The physicians hastened to employ the customary treatments: letting of blood, emetics, purgatives. But nothing soothed the King's headache, nothing reduced his fever, and on August 12 a physician, who had been called from Metz, declared that he could not answer for the patient's life.

The two sisters and Richelieu were the only ones at the sickbed; they admitted neither Princes of the Blood nor any high official of the Crown, except perhaps to hear Mass and then to retire immediately. The seriousness of the case was concealed as much as possible; everyone was excluded from the consultation of physicians except those whose devotion could be counted upon absolutely.

In the antechamber were the Duke de Bouillon, the Duke de Rochefoucauld, and members of the royal family, like the Count de Clermont. None of these would speak to anyone of the party of the favorite. Finally, the Count de Clermont forced his way in, approached the King's bed devotedly, but courageously, and said he absolutely could not believe that it was the King's intention to refuse the Princes of the Blood the satisfaction of assuring themselves of his improved health. They did not want to be obtrusive, but would retire immediately.

The King asked Clermont to stay, but he did not do so. However, the ice was broken. And now negotiations commenced between the Princes and Dukes who hated Madame de Châteauroux, and the Bishop of Soissons, Fitz-James, and his confessor Pérusseau, who hated her no less.

The Duchess guessed the object of these negotiations and wanted to know if it was the intention of the priests to withhold Extreme Unction unless she were driven away. The religious fears of the King had returned during his illness. He had a hallucination that the smoke of a piece of burning paper was the smoke of the flames of Hell.

She had Pérusseau summoned and asked him point-blank whether it was their intention to drive

her away. But although she and Richelieu both cross-questioned the Jesuit for hours, it was impossible to induce him to give an honest answer. At first he entrenched himself behind a pretended ignorance of the circumstances. Personally he put no evil interpretation upon the relations between the King and the Duchess. Even when she impatiently interrupted him with an open confession, he declared he was unable to say anything in advance. It all depended upon the nature of the royal confession.

On August 12, the Bishop of Soissons entered the room of the King before Mass, spoke to him about his condition and the duties it imposed. That evening Louis said coldly to the Duchess: "We shall perhaps be forced to separate."

The King's fears and anxiety increased; according to the physicians' opinion he had not more than two days to live. He lived, however, thirty-one years more. On August 13, the door leading from the royal bedchamber into that of the sisters was opened a little, and Fitz-James spoke through the crack of the door: "Ladies, the King orders you to withdraw at once."

Later, when the Bishop was about to give the King the Holy Sacrament, he learned that the sisters had not yet left Metz. He refused the Sacrament to the patient. Our Lord's Body could not be given as long as the concubines stayed within the city walls.

No sooner had the sisters fled in their coach, behind drawn curtains, surrounded by a mob which insulted them and would gladly have stoned them, than Louis received the Sacrament.

On the fourteenth the King was to receive the Extreme Unction. But as Fitz-James had been told that the sisters were staying only a few miles from Metz, the holy ceremony was postponed until they had received the royal order to continue their journey.

But the patient rallied, and by the middle of September he had completely recovered.

Meanwhile the two ladies had continued their journey. Wherever they went they were received with abuse. At every change of horses the Duchess de Châteauroux had to hide. Outside every city, out-

side every little village she had to get out, take some by-path, and wait for her coach, never, however, without hearing the howls of the mob demanding her head.

Finally, she entered Paris unobserved. The population there, in a silly fit of deification of the King, fearful and with tears coursing down their faces, kneeled in the churches and prayed for the Well-Beloved. An illness, which really was not at all dangerous, sufficed to earn the King the name of *Louis le Bien-Aimé.*

19

The news the Duchess received at her home in Paris, that the King had become reconciled with the Queen, made her desperate. She had no reason for this. Richelieu, who had gone to the army, sent the King a memorandum in which he referred to the King's illness and demonstrated what abuses the enemies of the Duchess had committed on the strength of the King's debilitated condition and his religious remorse during his illness; if the truth were known, this crowd was so interested in its own, selfish ambitions that it would have preferred to see a fatal outcome of the illness.

The King had gone to visit his father-in-law Stanislaw for a few days in Lunéville, where his sadness and absent-mindedness attracted everybody's attention. In reality he was thinking only of his lost friend. He was weary of the war. He didn't care for military glory, if only he could have an evening of pleasure soon; the moment the surrender of Freiburg was signed, he hurried to Paris.

He arrived there in the evening of November 13, heard the Te Deum in Notre Dame, attended a feast in the city hall and was taken through the streets of Paris in a carriage to see the illumination. But promptly on the night of the fourteenth he left the Tuileries, accompanied by Richelieu only, crossed the Pont-Royal and knocked at the door of the Duchess, in the rue du Bac.

She was so overcome at seeing him that she was

able to stammer only: "How you have treated us!" The King begged her to return to Versailles. She agreed to go for a few hours the next day, incognita. Officially, she would not return before she had been given full satisfaction and taken public revenge.

She began by demanding heads; all those who had driven her from Metz were to pay for it with their lives. Louis had the greatest difficulty in dissuading her of this absurd demand. However, deep in his own heart, he too hated those men.

Monsieur de Balleroy, because he was believed to be the author of the sermon delivered by the Bishop of Soissons against the Duchess de Châteauroux after he had given the King Extreme Unction, and Bishop Fitz-James, as well as Pérusseau, La Rochefoucauld, and the Duke of Bouillon, were exiled or deprived of the royal favor. The Duchess wanted to have the Princes of the Blood punished in the same way, but this was not possible. Finally she demanded the dismissal of her bitterest opponent, the Minister Maurepas. As the King could not do without him she had to be content with his humiliation in being made personally to deliver the King's letter inviting her to return to Versailles, and reinstating her in her honors. These negotiations took up eleven full days.

When Maurepas arrived in the rue du Bac he was informed that the Duchess was not at home. When he mentioned his name, he was told a second time that she was not in. When he declared that he came from the King, the door was finally opened to him. He found the Duchess in bed; she looked at him for a long time without saying anything, even without greeting him. Then she read the King's note, and answered it orally, professing her devotion to the King; but to all the Minister's assurances of devotion she returned only an ironic smile.

The Duchess was indeed bedridden, when Maurepas called. She had a little fever. At night her temperature went up. The following night her condition grew worse. On the third day it was so alarming that the Duchess made her last will, appointing her sister sole heir. She confessed to a priest, became reconciled with her sister de Flavacourt, and finally re-

ceived the Sacrament from a priest of Saint-Sulpice.

From December 1 on the patient suffered terrible pains, violent cramps, and in delirium constantly murmured the word poison and the name Maurepas.

The Duchess de Châteauroux died, at the age of twenty-seven, on December 8, 1744.

The autopsy showed no indications of poison; but who knows whether the physicians knew their business and whether they were honest.

The excitement and the emotional crises through which she had passed within the last months seem at any rate to have lowered the young woman's physical resistance.

In April, 1745, the King dined in private with Madame d'Etioles in Versailles, and on May 6 of the same year the apartment of the Duchess de Châteauroux in the Palace was newly decorated to suit the taste of the other lady. On September 14, 1745, ten months after the death of the Duchess, she was introduced to the Queen as the Marquise de Pompadour.

VII

THE MARQUISE DU CHÂTELET

1

In 1734, when Voltaire sought refuge in Cirey, it was almost uninhabitable. He had to engage masons, carpenters and cabinet-makers. The chateau was just about falling in ruins, and as the owners were not wealthy, nothing had been done to check the decay, especially since the owner was in garrison most of the time and the mistress usually stayed either in Lunéville or in Paris.

After a year's work, we see Madame du Châtelet still occupied with the workmen. Even four years later, when Madame de Graffigny visited Cirey, not much more than Emily's and Voltaire's living quarters had been comfortably furnished and decorated, while the rest of the house was lacking in comforts, even in cleanliness; the guest rooms were large uninhabitable places, impossible to fortify against wind and weather.

Voltaire was given a wing to himself. His entrance was by the main stairway. How his residence was ultimately decorated and furnished, we can see from Madame de Graffigny's enthusiastic description. A little foyer, a small study hung with red velvet tapestry and containing a velvet settle with gold trimmings. (Odd taste!) His bedroom had few tapestries but much panel-work hung with good paintings. There were mirrors, corner-cupboards, porcelain vases, a grandfather's clock decorated with Oriental figures, an open case containing a silver service, the rarest silver-work, all the superfluities that were so essential to Voltaire, and such cleanliness that one could kiss the floor. In the adjacent hall, on glazed pedestals, stood two little statues, a Venus and a

Hercules. Opposite them were two cupboards, one with books, the other with physical instruments; between them against the wall was an excellent stove. In front of this on a high pedestal was a Cupid shooting his arrow, and below it Voltaire's famous inscription:

Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître;
Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être.

This Cupid was later set in a niche. In addition there were tables, desks, clocks—in fact, as the little lady from the provinces adds naïvely: "You may believe it, there is nothing lacking." Just the same, there was only a sofa and no fauteuil; the armchairs were comfortable but not luxurious; one can feel, she says, that the ruling factors here are ease and comfort, not wealthy display. In the middle, a door leads into the garden, as though into a neat grotto. In the gallery the large portrait of Frederick the Great as Crown Prince occupies the place of honor. In a bowl lay twelve rings set with carved stones and two diamond rings.

Voltaire's rooms, however, were not comparable to those of the mistress of the house. The woodwork of her bedroom was light-yellow, with pale-blue stripes. This coloring was so dominant that everything, even the basket in which her dog slept, was light-yellow and light-blue: the woodwork of the chairs, the work-table, the corner-cupboards, and the desk. Her bedspread was of blue moiré. A large door of bevelled glass led into the library. Here were paintings by Paul Veronese. From the bedroom one went into a little boudoir which, as Madame de Graffigny says, was so lovely that at entering it one felt tempted to fall upon one's knees. It had a painting on the ceiling done by the popular French painter Martin and each section of the panelling was filled with a picture by Watteau. A single large window permitted a view of the terrace and delightful natural scenery. An alcove divided the room and led into a "divine" clothes-closet, with marble floor and fine engravings. All the linen, including the muslin curtains, was tastefully embroidered. On every hand stood and lay fifteen to twenty tobacco cases of enameled gold

studded with gems, Jaspe watches, with diamonds, enameled ash trays, boxes, and bowls of rings and watch charms.

The visitor was astonished; she knew that the Châtelet family was not wealthy. But she did not consider that Voltaire wherever he went, even on a brief visit, brought a stream of gold. After a visit of fifteen years he had with him a flood of gold.

2

During the time Voltaire used Cirey as his headquarters, he was by no means a steady resident there, but on the contrary led the most restless life. Madame du Châtelet had remained in Paris and did her best to soothe the government and dispose the leaders in Voltaire's favor. On June 22 he writes to Monsieur de Condamine:

"You will soon meet Madame du Châtelet. The friendship with which she honors me was not forgotten on this occasion. Her intellect is worthy of yours and that of Monsieur de Maupertuis, and her heart is worthy of her intellect. She renders services of friendship with the same ardent zeal with which she studies languages and geometry, and after doing one all kinds of favors, she thinks that she has done nothing, just as she belittles her intellectual attainments. Be very good to her, you and Monsieur de Maupertuis, and let us be her adorers for our entire lives. The Court does not deserve a woman like her, for all of its courtiers are not like you. Please tell her how deeply I am touched by her goodness. It is a long while since I have heard from her; but for all that, I am no less gratefully devoted to her."

In July Madame du Châtelet writes from Paris (to some unknown friend) that she is sorry that Voltaire's affair is in bad shape. It seems that the treasurer was appeased; he merely demanded that Voltaire deny ever having written that "unfortunate Book" (on England); in that case he promised to retract his *Lettre de cachet;* on the other hand, the ministry seems more irritated than ever before.

Otherwise the Marquise du Châtelet wasted no time with cares and worries; she saw a great deal of the two families Richelieu and Saint Pierre; she diligently studied English—for she had to do that to keep up with her lover—and, finally, she interested herself deeply in mathematics and physics. She had made the acquaintance of Maupertuis. He had become her teacher and friend. He taught her geometry and physics; he introduced her to Newton's studies. Still a young man, only thirty-six, he knew how to make the most difficult things easily comprehensible, to take the thorns out of study. At the same time she cultivated the acquaintance of young Clairaut, one of the best mathematicians of the time, who, though only twenty-one, had been a member of the Academy of Sciences for three years. Already he had several discoveries in geometry and higher mathematics to his credit. All her life the "respectable Emily" was in communication with these two. Both visited the couple at Cirey.

Maupertuis' abundance of knowledge, sense and courtesy inspired Madame du Châtelet to real enthusiasm. We have her letters to him. They reveal not only gratitude and devotion, but also a desire to see him as often as possible. If she hoped in vain for his visit, she cannot suppress complaints and reproaches. He, alone or with Clairaut, was always welcome at her supper-table. What she feels for him is probably purely an intellectual attachment, but with women the borderline between this and a physical passion is as a rule rather indefinite. She wants to become worthy of his instruction; she fears to betray this or that bit of ignorance and thus to forfeit his good opinion. In his company she experiences the pleasure of seeing the truth in its most attractive form.

Her soul and senses are too occupied with Voltaire to let this enthusiasm for Maupertuis become anything more than admiration. From the letters one gets the impression that her constant mention of Voltaire was irksome to him. For, when she writes him from Cirey at the end of October, 1734, she introduces her news of Voltaire with the excuse that this time it had been Maupertuis who mentioned him

first, and so she was compelled to answer. In the letter to Condamine quoted above Voltaire praises the Marquise, but it seems that for some time he has not heard from her; but it is just as surprising that Emily, after tearing herself away from Paris and arriving at Cirey to continue setting the castle in order, found him no longer there. He had gone to Brussels. In her letter to Maupertuis she says he had become a hypochondriac. But there is further evidence that a serious quarrel had started between them. Probably the Marquise's enthusiasm for Maupertuis got on Voltaire's nerves, which would explain the mockery with which eight years later he attacks his former friend and companion.

One should give careful attention to the wording of a letter sent by Voltaire from Holland to his most intimate friend, Count d'Argental. Apparently he is only irritated because Madame du Châtelet had searched for him everywhere. But why did he force her to do so?

"For a whole month I had no word from your friend [not our friend]; but I was merely sorry, without being angry, without thinking myself betrayed. Still less did I raise a hue and cry over all Germany. I confess that I am very peeved about the measures she took. She did more harm than you might think; but then there are no faults one cannot like if the heart is involved. I have the same reasons to forgive, that somebody else had to misbehave. You, my dear angel, would do a great wrong in condemning me without a hearing."

He found his Emily again in Cirey, and the reconciliation was hearty and complete. She was busy doing over the house, "putting in windows where he had put doors, changing stairways into chimneys, planting linden trees where he had intended elms; she worked as though endowed with the hands of a fairy, and furnished Cirey on nothing," as Voltaire tells it. The Marquise had hoped to have Voltaire go to Paris with her, to hear the Midnight Mass, which even today is such a popular event in that city; but Voltaire did not dare to leave Cirey. During his flight he had written his well-known tragedy *Alzire,* which Emily

was to submit for d'Argental's judgment. In Paris she sent Maupertuis the following note in which the spelling of proper names as usual breaks up the serenity of the modern perusal.

"Paris, Friday, Christmas night 1734.

"I would rather still be in Cirey and know that you were still in Basle, than to see as little of you as I do. I want to celebrate Eloïse's birth with you [Eloïse should be Elohim, God, hence Jesus]. See that you come tonight and drink his health with me and Clerau [Clairaut]. I shall expect you between eight and nine, and then we shall go together to Midnight Mass and listen to the Christmas psalms accompanied by organ music; from there I shall take you home; I am counting on this, unless Mademoiselle de Lagni vetoes it."

It seems that Voltaire's jealousy was not altogether unreasonable.

3

In his solitude in Cirey he spent his time in study and partly in elaborating the first eight cantos of the poem which his contemporaries admired more than anything else he wrote, and which has injured his reputation with posterity more than anything he wrote.

The origin of *La Pucelle* goes back to 1730, when during a dinner at Richelieu's house, the conversation turned to the poet Chapelain whose glory was great, but whose poem on the Maid of Orléans struck the contemporaries of Louis XV as merely comical.

Under Louis XIV Jeanne d'Arc had been glorified for the sake of the Kingship. Respect for the unimportant Charles VII kept her memory alive. Chapelain's *La Pucelle* dates from the year 1656. In spite of the title, Jeanne is not the central character of the work. The hero is the Bastard of Orléans, because he was the ancestor of Chapelain's patron, the Duke of Longueville, to whom the poem was dedicated.

Chapelain's *La Pucelle* is an epic in Alexandrines,

with Vergilian similes and mythological trappings in the form of God, Satan and the angels. There is not one correct verse, nor one really living line in the whole work. Chapelain found his admirers among the fine ladies (like the elegant Madame de la Suze) whom Molière satirized in *Les Précieuses ridicules*.

Toward the end of the work Chapelain is faced with the problem of reconciling the disgrace of his hero and saint with the goodness of God and His plans. He succeeds. He has the "Uncreated" God high above Heaven in a special sort of loge to which He is accustomed to retire to meditate on the fate of the Universe. With its three equal sides this incomprehensible loge forms a unique triangle—an altogether admirable triangle—and from this secret coign of vantage the unknown Mystery (the poet explains rather confusingly) fails to distinguish the contents from the container:

> Plus haut que tous les Cieux une Loge secrette
> Sert à l'Estre incréé de profonde retraitte,
> Quand par ses soins vaillans et ses pensers couverts
> Il veut délibérer du Sort de l'Univers.
> De trois cotés égaux la Loge inconcevable
> Forme un Triangle unique en tout sens admirable,
> Et d'un lieu si secret le mystère inconnu
> Confound le contenat avec le contenu.

God finds the English haughty and self-possessed, and Charles VII hard-hearted. His strict, impartial justice therefore resolves to sacrifice Jeanne to punish the others—in reality rather doubtful justice. The Uncreated Being, as He is called, is a heavenly King, surrounded like Louis XIV by a Court. The Blessed Courtiers follow the cruel trials of the inconquerable girl, and pray for the Maid. But the King of Heaven turns a deaf ear to the petitions of His Court. Only later, when He sees Jeanne's pious submission and recognizes that she is grieving only over King Charles' misfortune, not her own, He relents and permits the heavenly Court to lighten the Maid's suffering from the torments with which Hell scourges her in her prison, by giving her concerts which numb her pain and drive away her fears.

As Aristotle taught that woman is a blunder of

Nature, that ceased halfway in the intention of creating a man, with Chapelain even Jeanne became subordinate as a mere woman. Dunois is the hero, Jeanne nothing more than the grace by which God was pleased to strengthen the hero's arm. The preface explains that the entire composition is an allegory: France in this case means the human soul in its battle with itself; King Charles is the Will, which, although naturally inclined to the good, can easily be misled into evil if it has the appearance of good; the English and the Bourguignons are Excesses of Ire; Amaury and Agnes are examples of Sensual Desire, Dunois is Virtue, Tanneguy is Understanding, and La Pucelle, as said before, is Divine Grace personified, who, though all strength of Soul is broken down, strengthens the Will, keeps up the Understanding, unites with Virtue, conquers Instinct, and thus in the end brings Peace.

The poem, mostly boring, becomes burlesque in places, as the passage where Jeanne, in a cave of Compiègne forest, takes her sustenance from "acorns and grief" for a month.

The dreadful puns are helpful in achieving the air of solemnity for which the poet is striving:

> Sur elle l'Anglais tonne et tonne à grands éclats;
> Mais pour tonner sur elle, il ne l'étonne pas.

Some parts of Voltaire's work can be appreciated only if one knows the original of which they are a parody; for instance, in the droll lines:

> Jeanne étonné, ouvrant un large bec,
> Crut quelque temps que l'on lui parlait grec,
> La grâce agit, cette augustine grâce
> Dans son esprit porte un jour efficace.

Fun is made of the wonderful transformations of Jeanne's mind in Chapelain's poem.

4

The sublime aspect of Jeanne d'Arc, that is familiar to the modern world for the last century and a half,

had not been brought to light in Voltaire's day. Jeanne's contemporaries had done everything possible to disgrace and besmirch her, before they burned her on the pyre. They were, however, convinced that God spoke to man through virgins. But one had to differentiate between false and true prophetesses. And first of all one had to ascertain that the virgin really was a virgin. Hence, immediately upon her arrival in Chinon, Jeanne was carefully examined by matrons. Hence again the six-weeks examination to which she had to submit in Poitiers, attended by midwives, proven virgins, widows and wives. Among these women was the Queen of Sicily and Jerusalem, the Duchess of Anjou, Lady Jeanne de Preuilly, the fifty-seven-year-old wife of Monsieur de Gaucourt, governor of Orléans, and the eighteen-year-old wife of the Messire Robert le Maçon, Jeanne de Mortemer.

For Jeanne d'Arc's contemporaries virginity had a special power. For the devil never had dealings with a virgin. This explains the thrice-repeated examination of Jeanne by the English when she languished in her prison, that outrageous examination which, although performed by women, the Regent of England, the Duke of Bedford, was not ashamed to watch through a hole in the prison wall. When this last examination again gave the prisoner a favorable verdict, an attempt was made to dishonor her by rape and thus to make admission easier for the devil.

In the eyes of their immediate posterity neither Jeanne d'Arc nor Dunois was of sufficient importance to furnish the material for an epic composition. On the other hand, France's fanatic and superstitious clergy had made capital of Jeanne as a miracle-girl. This led those who were repelled by such superstition to scoff at the buxom country tavern-lass, who, at the age of twenty-seven, was called a virginal saint.

That Jeanne was only eighteen years old and had never been a bar maid, was not known in Voltaire's time.

The scoffers never thought, either, of the historic Jeanne but of the legend hatched up in the vestry

rooms and polished into a clerical propaganda figure by a bad poet. How far Voltaire, too, was from trying to attack her historic aspect, is shown best by the description he gives of her in his *Essai sur les mœurs*. Here he writes:

"These victories, won by a young girl through an apparent miracle, the unction of the King, which showed her to be a saint, soon recovered the kingdom for Charles and drove out the foreigners. The instrument of these miracles, however, Jeanne d'Arc herself, was injured and captured while defending Compiègne. A man like the Black Prince would have honored and esteemed her courage; the Regent Bedford thought it necessary to dishonor her in order to strengthen the English position.

"She had pretended to work wonders [Voltaire in the spirit of his time naïvely believes Jeanne was consciously lying]; Bedford pretended to believe her a witch.

"The University of Paris started an inquisition, accusing Jeanne d'Arc of heresy and magic. The University believed what Bedford wished or if it did not, was guilty of detestable cowardice. This heroine, who was worthy of the miracle she pretended to have performed, was sentenced in Rouen by Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, with five other French bishops and an English bishop, aided by a Dominican monk, the representative of the Inquisition, and by the doctors of the University. She was stamped as a superstitious prophetess of the devil, slanderess of God and His saints, etc. As such she was condemned to life imprisonment on bread and water. . . .

"When she was accused of wearing men's clothes—an attire which was purposely left to her at her trial [and which she had worn at night to ward off the soldiers who attacked her]—her judges, who did not even have jurisdiction over her as a prisoner of war, pronounced her guilty of relapsing into heresy. They burned at the stake this heroine who had been the savior of their King, to whom, had she lived in our day, men would have erected altars. Charles VII later on restored her memory, although it was already made immortal by her martyrdom."

These forcible words prove that Voltaire knew well the worth of Jeanne d'Arc and what a disgrace her fate was to mankind.

One day in the year 1730 the guests at Richelieu's table expressed their conviction that Voltaire was far better equipped to treat the theme than Chapelain had been. Voltaire answered that nothing seemed to him less suited for epic treatment than the story of a bar-maid who left her tap-room to die at the stake. The story in his opinion should be told in a mock-heroic vein, in the style of *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto. Richelieu asked him to try it; the others present joined in the request and Voltaire was amenable to persuasion. With his gift of improvization he quickly wrote some of the lines and read them to the company, winning enthusiastic applause. He promised his audience and himself that before long he would go on with the work. In his retirement in Cirey he elaborated four cantos, and thenceforward the work became his dearest pastime, his favorite sin, his secret vice, the greatest daring of his life, which might expose him to all kinds of dangers; his admirers (of both sexes) were dying to see it, and when they did they were paralyzed with delight. Voltaire's *La Pucelle* became a shibboleth, a byword, a touchstone. Those who knew something of it were initiated, were fellow-conspirators of the freethinking opposition.

5

To understand the importance ascribed to the satire by its contemporaries one must consider that "the supernatural," which no longer affects the enlightened world, at that time obtruded itself upon even those who were so intelligent that of their own accord they would never have given it a thought.

It was not until this period that the population began to throw off the grossest superstition. For instance, people had just begun to doubt the authenticity of Magdalene's and Lazarus' dwelling in Provence, to doubt the existence of saints like Saint Marguerite, whose voice spoke to Jeanne d'Arc; finally they began

to question the fake miracles and relics. In 1702 an enlightened priest, the Bishop of Chalôns-sur-Marne, Gaston Louis de Noailles, threw away a relic, worshipped for centuries as the navel of Jesus Christ. Everybody in Chalôns grumbled. Royal and Parliamentary officials protested and called attention to the fact that Christ's clothing was preserved in Argenteuil and in Treves, his cloak at Turin and at Laon, one of the nails of his cross in St. Denis, etc. But the clamor of the credulous mob rebounded from the Bishop's firmness.

At that time the Devil was talked of as much as during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the hope of meeting him somewhere and asking his counsel prominent ladies in scanty attire met with all kinds of strange adventures. Deacon Pâris, mentioned before, threw the faithful into convulsions while working his miracles.

Toulon, too, had its miracle: An old Jesuit by the name of Girard, who disciplined his pupil, the pretty Mademoiselle Cadière, by frequent gentle chastisements, declared, in 1731, that this treatment had glorified the features and figure of his interesting penitent to such an extent that her hands and feet showed traces of the nails of the Saviour, blood had dropped from the wounds, also from those caused by the crown of thorns on the forehead. The monk was believed, or at least he appeared to be. Nobody dared to investigate the matter.

Then to the general astonishment it developed that the chastisements had been fertilizing. Old and ugly as Girard was, one morning it was disclosed that the pretty Cadière was pregnant, and not she alone but a number of the other penitents of the Abbé: shop-girls, working-girls, and ladies.

Now the Jansenists insisted that Girard, who was a Jesuit, was the Devil himself; whereupon the Jesuits retorted that the Devil had possessed Mademoiselle Cadière, who had obviously bewitched Girard. Provence was divided into two parties; but as the clergy had the upper hand the supporters of the King in the Parliament of Aix proposed to have Mademoiselle Cadière hanged.—A sort of justice that aroused

the greater part of the population and gave rise to numerous assemblies of protest.

Now Girard had the brilliant idea of getting all of his pregnant penitents out of the way into convents. He could trust the discretion of the nuns. The Convent of Ollioules, where he took Mademoiselle Cadière, bore an evil reputation; the Abbess led a free life; the wealthy inmates of the convent were served by monks; the poorer nuns found consolation in passionate friendship for each other.

The Bishop of Toulon at first took the part of Mademoiselle Cadière; but intimidated by the Jesuits, who hinted at certain weak spots in his own conduct, he was persuaded to join them.

The trial was a scandal. The judges threatened all the witnesses appearing against Girard with torture; the two representatives sent to Toulon by the Parliament of Paris fraternized with the Jesuits. But the simple defence of the young woman in court appeared so truthful and made Girard seem so guilty that the case was brought before the Parliament in Aix, where all society took the side of the Jesuit brother. He declared with calm effrontery that he had done no more than to obey the rules of the religious mystic. That he as her confessor had locked himself up with his penitent and chastised her, as was his right and duty; what was being called indecent was essential to break down her worldly pride.

The verdict of this trial was to hang la Cadière in the square of the Dominican Convent in Toulon. But all the people of the lower classes thronged to the prison and called: "Don't worry, miss, we are here!"

Then a sudden change took place in the Parliament. The Jansenists declared that Girard deserved the stake; that he was a sorcerer, possessed of the Devil. When (in October, 1731) the verdict was announced, twelve votes were for condemning Girard to death, twelve were for setting him free. The vote of the president decided and Girard was dismissed.

Voltaire regarded the trial humorously. Hence, in the second canto of *La Pucelle,* these verses about the God Morpheus:

Aux cris du moine il monte en son char noir,
Par deux hiboux traîné; dans la nuit sombre.
Dans l'air il glisse, et doucement fend l'ombre.
Les yeux fermés, il arrive en bâillant,
Se met sur jeanne, et tâtonne, et s'étend;
Et secouant son pavot narcotique,
Lui souffle au sein vapeur soporifique,
Tel on nous dit que le moine Girard,
En confessant la gentille Cadière,
Insinuait de son souffle paillard
De diabloteaux une ample fourmilière.

Voltaire does not dwell upon the outrageousness given the affair by the courts nor upon the vulgarity and hypocrisy of the monk; what amuses him is the assertion of the Jansenists that the Devil was involved, that the case could not be explained in a natural way, that Girard must be a sorcerer. With sarcasm he swears that Girard himself, his accusers and defenders, his opponents and protectors, his witnesses and judges, were all far from being sorcerers.

Venez, venez, mon beau père Girard
Vous méritez un long article à part,
Vous voilà donc, mon confesseur de fille,
Tendre dévot qui prêchez à la grille,
Que dîtes-vous des pénitents appas
De ce tendron converti dans vos bras?
J'estime fort cette douce aventure,
Tout est humain, Girard, en votre fait;
Ce n'est pas là pécher contre nature.
Que de dévots en ont encor plus fait!
Mais, mon ami, je ne m'attendais guère
De voir entrer le diable en cette affaire.
Girard, Girard, tous vos accusateurs,
Jacobin, carme, et feseur d'écriture,
Juges, témoins, ennemis, protecteurs,
Aucun de vous n'est sorcier, je vous jure.

6

La Pucelle was a joke written by Voltaire for his own amusement and that of a few of his intimate friends. At first it was not his intention that it should be a work for the public. He had qualms about every canto he finished, and refused a copy even to persons whom he could trust. In 1737 Frederick the Great asked in vain for a copy. Six years later the Prussian King came into the possession of a few cantos, but had to promise to keep them inaccessible even to his

intimate circle. The rest was kept by Madame du Châtelet at Cirey under seven seals.

But all these precautions were of no avail. Treacherous secretaries made copies which to Voltaire's sorrow came into circulation.

On September 2, 1735, at four o'clock in the morning, he was informed that several cantos were in circulation in Paris. He wrote at once asking for further information, made it plain that the matter was of extreme importance, and he prepared to flee. When it turned out that only a few copies existed and that these represented only a small part of the work, he forgot his fears. But later the number of copies increased, their contents became more complete, and it seemed especially dangerous that whoever had made the copies had filled in the gaps with the clumsiest obscenities.

It was just this, however, that gave Voltaire the idea of the means by which he could save himself. He had entirely new manuscripts made, filled so full of nonsense and bad verses that nobody could believe him the author of such coarse and stupid jokes.

The insipidity of single parts and the imperfection of the technique, however, were by no means followed by a decrease in the demand; the manuscripts were fought for.

In the year 1754, twenty-four years after he had begun the composition he learned, to his despair, that a printing was planned. In 1755 an edition appeared which was quickly followed by others. Then d'Alembert advised him to publish an edition himself. For a long time he could not make up his mind to do so. Finally, in 1762, he published the work.

From a modern standpoint it appears probable that the author was induced to withhold the work for a whole generation because of its many indecent parts. But one would be mistaken in believing that Voltaire himself found the composition indecent. The eighteenth century conception of what was fit for polite ears was different from that of the twentieth century. Most of the eminent ladies of that time read—and even wrote—without being in the least ashamed, things which would offend or embarrass a well-bred

woman of today. All writers of that time mentioned the obscene more or less frankly—not only wags like Piron or Gresset, or the younger Crebillon, but even the most sedate like Montesquieu (in his *Lettres Persanes*), and the most exalted like Diderot (in *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*).

No, what Voltaire feared was an accusation of sacrilege and scoffing at the saints, although in reality he had only poked fun at a dull superstition. He says himself that the reproaches uttered against him because of his ridicule of superstition proved how necessary and useful his work was. The desire with which it was sought on all sides was a sign of the bad foundation beneath the dogmatic creed of that time. Even in the cloisters *La Pucelle* was read with enthusiasm.

7

When Voltaire visited Frederick in 1750 he presented the King with a copy of the part of *La Pucelle* then finished, but he dismissed his secretary Tinois when he discovered that the latter had stolen a copy for Frederick's brother, Prince Henry.

We find that the Duke de La Vallière purchased a copy for fifty louis d'or. In 1755 Voltaire approached d'Héméry, the police commissioner of Paris, with a request that he prevent the printing of copies. But in June, 1755, he himself sent a hand-written copy to the Marquise de Pompadour, which, however, did not contain the mocking lines about the Marquis, which Voltaire had interwoven for his own pleasure in the second canto:

Telle plutôt cette heureuse grisette
Que la nature ainsi que l'art forma
Pour le bordel ou bien pour l'opéra,
Qu'une maman avisée et discrète
Au noble lit d'un fermier éleva,
Et que l'Amour, d'une main plus adrète,
Sous un monarque entre deux draps plaça,
Sa vive allure est un vrai port de reine,
Ses yeux fripon s'arment de majesté,
Sa voix a pris le ton de souveraine,
Et sur son rang son esprit s'est monté.

These are verses which he would have done better to omit, he who had known Madame de Pompadour in her youth, who had enjoyed her benefactions, who had written verses in her honor and who liked to tell her flattering things. If she had read lines like those above, the friendship would, of course, have been finished.

Anyone who in his youth has read *La Pucelle* and who has been surprised by the curiosity and indignation the work aroused at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is apt to again be surprised, if he rereads it how innocuous this composition really is. In our day it appears obsolete, largely because the things it attacks were destroyed by Voltaire himself, and because it is so interlarded with contemporary allusions that, like most literary satires, it cannot be understood without commentaries.

The only thing about the poem that shocks us today is the apparently heartless and tasteless burlesque of Jeanne. Even so, the burlesque was intended to be merely of the superstition which had crystallized around Jeanne d'Arc, as pebbles, dirt and seaweed form a solid mass around the shell containing a pearl.

In its original form, the work dealt with entirely other matters than Jeanne. Read the first cantos and note how he pokes fun at the Black Arts, which were then believed in. St. Denis rides his sunbeam, Jeanne her jackass. The Franciscan monk, Grisbourdon, enchants the mule-driver into a mule and rides it.

There is not a little humor, when, in the second canto, Baudricour accuses the King of forgetting France's distress in his love for Agnes Sorel, and when the knight announces to him that a different woman, who by virtue of her virginity possesses magic power, will come to his aid and will drive the English from the country. The only question which King Charles finds important enough to put to Jeanne is about her virginity:

> Donc, se tournant vers la fière beauté,
> Le roi lui dit, d'un ton de majesté
> Qui confondrait tout autre fille qu'elle:
> "Jeanne, écoutez: Jeanne, êtes-vous pucelle?"

Not only humorous but in keeping with the absurdity of the historic fact, is Jeanne's answer:

> Jeanne lui dit: "O grand sire, ordonnez
> Que médécins, lunettes sur le nez,
> Matrones, clercs, pédants, apothecaires,
> Viennent sonder ces féminins mystères;
> Et si quelqu'un se connaît à cela,
> Qu'il trousse Jeanne et qu'il regarde là."

Very drolly conceived is the answer by which Jeanne convinces the King of her miraculous mission:

> A sa réponse et sage et mesurée
> Le roi vit bien qu'elle était inspirée.
> "Or sus, dit-il, dites moi en savez tant,
> Fille de bien, dites moi dans l'instant
> Ce que j'ai fait cette nuit à ma belle?
> Mais parlez net!"—"Rien du tout," dit-elle.
> Le roi surpris soudain s'agenouilla,
> Cria tout haut: "Miracle!" et se signa.

The third canto satirized the stupidity of contemporary mankind. Stupidity is described as a Queen (La Sottise) ruling over a great empire filled with all the horrors for which she was responsible: the pyre which consumed Urbain Grandier; the other upon which Marie de Medici's lady-in-waiting, Eleonore Galigai was burned as a witch; the edict issued under Louis XIII prohibiting under penalty of the galleys the teaching of any philosophy other than that of Aristotle, or the sale of any emetic.

In the first part the ridicule centers about the miraculous effects of Jeanne's virginity and about all that is done, on the one hand, to end that sublime condition, and on the other, to preserve it undefiled. The effect is uproarious when the stupid monk cries out to the English: "Tremble, she is a virgin!"

> Elle est pucelle, Anglais, frémissez tous;
> C'est Saint Denis qui l'arme contre vous.

In the fifth canto the arrival of the monk Grisbourdon in Hell gives occasion for a merry description of the life led by the Devil and his vassals, a description reminiscent neither of Dante's *Inferno* nor Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

In the final revision of the work Voltaire found it necessary for the sake of his safety to eliminate a great part, which is now found as appendix matter in some editions. According to the original outline (in the edition of 1756), Voltaire's Hell housed the great missionary Emperor Constantine because of his crimes, as well as Saint Louis of France because of the slaughter of the Saracens, and because of his asceticism and his self-tortures. Its roll call boasted not only saints, but also revered reformers like Luther and Calvin. While Luther did not interest the poet especially, and is only mentioned in passing, Calvin is damned as the evil-eyed, stony-hearted, jealous fanatic who sent poor Servet to the stake; Voltaire also treats Calvin's city, fanatic Geneva, which he knew very well, with deep contempt.

This is not the only section that Voltaire found it necessary to tone down, and the alterations were never as witty or as effective as the lines that they supplanted. The same is true in the twentieth canto where the jackass kneels before Jeanne's bed and announces his astonishing age: for it is Balaam's ass from Canaan, who enjoys eternal youth, but has to live for a thousand years in celibacy. Then follows a passage which was absolutely in violation of the laws of the time concerning blasphemy: it is that in which the ass declares himself the one on whose back Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem.

Je vis couler, content de mon état,
Plus de mille ans dans ce doux célibat.
Bientôt il plut au maître du tonnerre,
Au créateur du ciel et de la terre,
Pour racheter le genre humain captif
De se faire homme et, ce qui pis est, Juif.
Joseph Panther et la brune Marie
Sans le savoir fit cet œuvre pie.

This earlier version of the ass's story is far funnier than the way the final text gives it:

C'était un point de sa réligion
Que sur un âne il entrât dans Sion;
Cet âne était prédit par Isaïe
Ezéchiel, Baruch et Jérémie.
C'était un cas important dans la loi;
O Jeanne d'Arc! cet âne, c'était moi.

However, this winds up with a very ugly fantasy, and Voltaire was right in removing this portion and preventing its publication, as far as possible.

Whoever reads *La Pucelle* today should note the introductory stanzas of the cantos. They are gay and usually contain some joke or confession from Voltaire's own life. Thus the introduction to the seventh makes reference to Voltaire's bitter experience in his youth with Mademoiselle de Livry and his friend, and at the same time he calls it unworthy to hate and to persecute the girl who has thrown one one.

Several of the conceits which have very little to do with the theme are extremely witty. When Dunois, in the course of his journey arrives at the Castle of Glory, Voltaire describes Fama as an old chattering goddess, who would like to win everybody to herself: She has two trumpets; one she puts to her lips and glorifies heroic deeds; the other she puts behind her and through it announces the names of the literary lice which make their livelihood as parasites of great persons. Then follows a list of Voltaire's literary enemies: Guyot, Fréron, la Beaumelle, and Nonnotte, whose acquaintance we have not yet made.

The work as a whole appears today not only unpoetic but hardly funny. Its indecencies, which revolt us when they pollute a figure like that of Jeanne d'Arc, are no more entertaining when applied to Charles VII's mistress, Agnes Sorel. And all in all indecency for its own sake is no longer amusing. Where the work is meant to be most daring, it becomes unreadable. What was once poetry for princes, is now scarcely poetry for servants.

It is dangerous for a great spirit to have satisfied his contemporaries to too great a degree. Voltaire did this as a serious epic poet in his *Henriade,* as a mock-epic poet in *La Pucelle.*

Both works are obsolete today. They have fulfilled their purpose, have fired their ammunition. Now we look upon them as one would regard two mortars of obsolete design in an arsenal.

8

An extraordinary number of the things Voltaire said about Madame du Châtelet are on record; his remembered conversation, his letters, his published works, verse as well as prose, abound with admiration of her and devotion to her. Rarely has a writer immortalized his mistress as Voltaire has the Marquise. One has to go back to Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio to find such constant and devoted praise of one woman; they, however, call the lady only by her first name, make her unreal, and praise her in such a way as to make her recognition by strangers impossible. One must go still further back, to the troubadours of Provençe of the twelfth century, to find this particular adoration, the expression of a love in which the intellectual element prevails. Voltaire was far from being a troubadour; but his deification of Emily has something about it which comes directly from the Provençal lyricists.

He is to be seen purely as a lover only in the earliest poems of the year 1734. One of the most deep-felt is the forty-seventh epistle to Urania.

Here are a few verses:

Je vous adore, ô ma chère Uranie!
Pourquoi si tard m'avez vous enflammé?
Qu'ai-je donc fait des beaux jours de ma vie?
Ils sont perdus; je n'avais point aimé.
Je n'ai vécu que du jour, où ton âme
M'a pénetré de sa divine flamme;
Que de ce jour où, livré tout à toi,
Le monde entier a disparu pour moi.
Ah quel bonheur de te voir, de t'entendre!
Que ton esprit a de force et d'appas!
Dieux! que ton plaisirs je goûte dans tes bras!
Trop fortuné, j'aime ce que j'admire.

None of his former feelings for women were comparable in any way with this one which conquered Voltaire both deeply and permanently. He had become so much a creature of the mind that no woman could fascinate him seriously without fascinating him mentally. Emily was a "*philosophe*" i.e., she was above prejudices to which the mob subscribed; this

was why Voltaire could feel that they were on a common intellectual plane. But Emily was in addition an independent thinker, an indefatigable worker, and, what was of even greater importance, her inclinations made her the perfect complement of Voltaire. What filled his life, poetry and history, was for her of secondary interest. The things that attracted her, mathematics and physics, were sciences in which he interested himself seriously during the time they lived together. They had in common the desire to formulate a philosophy of life. He tried to deduce a metaphysical system somewhat after Newton's method in astronomy; she was more attracted by the kind of metaphysics developed by Leibnitz. Later, however, Newton became common territory, and Newton's adoration became the vestibule of the temple in which they met.

As said before, Madame du Châtelet's first introduction to the study of Newton, with Maupertuis as teacher, aroused some ill-humor on the part of her friend. It seemed to him (perhaps for the first and last time in his life) that he had been surpassed in brilliance in the eyes of the one whom he was most anxious to impress. The fortieth epistle bears witness of this. In it are these lines:

Vous renoncez aux étincelles,
Aux feux follets de mes écrits,
Pour des lumières immortelles;
Et le sublime Maupertuis
Vient éclipser mes bagatelles.
Je n'en suis faché ni surpris.

But such passing ill-humor did not affect the attachment Voltaire felt. This was so deep that ten years after Emily's death, when he began to write down his memories, he commenced with a description of her character, his relations with her and their living together at Cirey, which was mentally so fruitful. He did not forget her passionate love of clothes, and he mentioned this as early as 1733 in a letter to the Abbé de Sade, in a short jesting verse:

Cette belle âme est une étoffe
Qu'elle brode en mille façons;
Son esprit est très philosophe,
Et son cœur aime les pompons.

He tells us how Madame du Châtelet did the castle entirely over, as soon as they had resolved to retire there; he tells about assembling an important physical apparatus, and how scholars visited them to philosophize with them in their solitude. He mentions the famous physicist König, who was a professor in The Hague and the librarian of the Princess of Orania and who lived at Cirey two years. He names Maupertuis who, he says, is jealous of him, and hence hostile.

He reports that he taught Madame du Châtelet English and that in three months she had as good a mastery of that language as he; thereafter they read together Locke, Newton and Pope. No less quickly she learned Italian; they read together all of Tasso and Ariosto. When Frederick the Great's friend, Algarotti, came to Cirey, where he finished his *Newtonianismo per le Dame,* she was so familiar with his language that she was able to offer in Italian many valuable suggestions.

In their secluded life she and Voltaire tried not only to round out their general knowledge, but also to keep in touch with everything that was going on in the intellectual world. Madame du Châtelet studied Leibnitz and developed part of his system in her well-written book *Institutions de Physique.* She wrote simply, clearly, firmly and gracefully.

By and by, Voltaire says, she discarded Leibnitz' ideas abandoning metaphysics altogether in favor of the discoveries of Newton. She translated his entire "Principia" into French, and after having strengthened her knowledge further she added to this difficult work a commentary which was edited by Clairaut.

9

Voltaire's description—written for publication—of Madame du Châtelet's studies and scientific production, gives an account of various complicating and embarrassing circumstances following the publication of her book on the doctrines of Leibnitz.

At first, under the influence of Voltaire as well as of Maupertuis, she had adopted Newton and the gen-

eral principles of exact scientific reasoning; later, during König's two-year sojourn at Cirey, she was converted by him to Leibnitz' monadology. She appears in her book *Institutions de Physique* a convinced disciple of Leibnitz. Although Voltaire was far from being able to follow her belief in monads, differences over one point or another in philosophy could not disturb their mutual regard.

In her book Madame du Châtelet, had ventured in a very polite way to disagree with the views of Monsieur de Mairan, *Secrétaire perpétuel* at the Royal Academy of Sciences, on the question of the standard of measurement of moving energy—at the same time expressing the hope that Monsieur de Mairan would regard her objections as evidence of the esteem which she felt for his work. Monsieur de Mairan (she says) had mentioned everything that could be said in favor of a wrong premise. This wrong premise was his rejection of the principle of the conservation of energy. This fallacy was also subscribed to by Voltaire in his essay *Doutes sur la mesure des forces vives et sur leur nature,* which, mentions neither Monsieur de Mairan, nor Madame du Châtelet.

Monsieur de Mairan defended his views in an open letter and was wrong, as Voltaire was. His tone was unnecessarily belligerent, and by his remark, that his opponent probably had not read nor understood his treatise, he gave rise to a rumor that Madame du Châtelet was not the real author of her book.

The *Institutions de Physique* had been written during König's stay at Cirey, and Madame du Châtelet in her honesty was really trying to give him all the honor that was due him for the book, all the more because during her and Voltaire's last journey to Paris, on which König accompanied them, a quarrel had arisen between the physicist and herself. The cause is unknown, but the matter was so embarrassing to the Marquise that she did not speak of it to Voltaire.

In a letter to Maupertuis, who had recommended König to her (September 12, 1740), she asks his advice before the publication of her book: "Please tell me whether you think that what I said about König in

the preface is sufficient, or if the publisher's announcement should say something more about him. I told the truth in both places; you could see from the concessions I made you, that I have not the art of disguising it, not even if it were unfavorable to me."

König, who ten years later was to interfere in Voltaire's life in an unforeseen manner, was a Swiss from Berne who had been expelled from his home for the follies of his youth. Maùpertuis had sent him to Madame du Châtelet in Cirey, as a teacher and helper for her geometrical studies. König himself related how one day she told him impatiently that what he was teaching her in mathematics were obvious things that she already knew. Thereupon he had answered that she was right; but there were other things far more important than mathematics, and no less enlightening—namely metaphysics. Voltaire's friend began to laugh, but König insisted that he could easily prove them to her, if she would only pay him the necessary attention.

After the break between them he told his friends that to each lesson at Cirey he had brought along a syllabus of the point he wanted to prove; he had explained it, had proved it and asked the Marquise if she acknowledged it. As soon as she had said yes, he handed her the paper to sign. And this pack of signed papers, he insisted, was the foundation of the Marquise's *Introduction métaphysique.* She had done nothing but put his ideas into form and style; the work itself was his.

Such remarks of König were apparently carried to Mairan, as he expressed himself so sarcastically. The Marquise, very angry, wrote a splendid reply, highly sarcastic, which brought the laughter and sympathies of the literary world to her side (*Réponse de Madame la marquise du Châtelet à la lettre que M. de Mairan lui a écrite le 18 fevrier 1741 sur la question des forces vives*). This reply appeared one month after the attack.

She wrote to d'Argental:

"Mairan is now rather put out, which is very natural. He had to be, because he was wrong and has dragged personal matters into a purely literary differ-

ence. I was not the one who began the petty spitefulnesses. The *Institutions* is very careful to be polite to him and make every excuse for his absurdities; but his replies have been full of offensive remarks about me and completely devoid of arguments that might defend his position. Could I ever retort too sharply to his accusation, that I had neither read nor understood him, and that I had plagiarized the main features of my book?"

Voltaire, whose ideas agreed with Mairan's, while his heart was with the pretty and angry Emily, tried his best to straighten out the disagreement between her and Mairan, as well as that between her and Maupertuis. He wrote to Mairan that it was impossible for him to regard the break between him and the Marquise seriously. "I flatter myself that your little skirmish with Madame du Châtelet will serve to increase the esteem and friendship you feel for each other." To Maupertuis, who to Emily's bitter disappointment had taken the part of König, he wrote in the same conciliatory spirit. For Maupertuis, without any exact information about what had happened, gave her to understand that she was shamefully wrong in a matter in which she believed she was behaving very generously. Voltaire sent word to the scholar so admired by Emily: "Write her. A man is always in the right with a woman even when he is wrong. You will retain her friendship; she still respects you." Voltaire, however, had to write twice before the stubborn Maupertuis gave in. But then the Marquise answered heartily:

"I don't do things by halves, either in love or in reconciliation; I have given you back my heart and I count upon the steadfastness of yours. I have not concealed my sorrow over the rift in our friendship, and now I am not trying to hide my joy that we have got over it. You have taught me how painful it is to have to complain of a person whom one would like to love and whom one cannot help respecting."

Sifting this quarrel about scientific views and personal feelings, one comes to the question of the scope, the strength, the originality of Madame du Châtelet's

talent for mathematics and science. Voltaire never calls her less than a genius, and this apparently not because of love for her, but out of honest and profound admiration.

Devotion to science gave stability and firmness to Madame du Châtelet's personality—a devotion, strong enough to induce her to forsake social triumphs and to spend her days and nights at her studies. Work was a necessity and a joy for her. She overcame the greatest difficulties. She delved into Newton, and understood him so well that she translated him. Though a disciple of Newton, she showed enough independence to assert herself concerning the theory of the conservation of energy in favor of Leibnitz' departure from Descartes, although Newton at the end of his chapter on optics had accepted Descartes' conclusion. She was therefore able to give a clear presentation of the ideas of the philosophers and mathematicians. Beyond that her capacities were doubtless limited, as female talent generally is, in the field of science.

At the end of the nineteenth century Sonja Kowalewska's mathematical talent, which some called genius, caused a sensation similar to the case of Emily du Châtelet in the middle of the eighteenth century. For her research work Sonja Kowalewska received an honorary degree from the Academy, which Madame du Châtelet did not. Nevertheless Sonja Kowalewska, even as a professor of mathematics in Stockholm, remained the pupil of the great mathematician Weierstrass in Berlin. If he gave her a problem to solve she showed ability and sagacity in her answer. On her own initiative she accomplished nothing.

In the same way Emily du Châtelet astounded people with her capacity, amazing for a woman, for solving the most abstruse mathematical and physical problems. But she was a pupil of Maupertuis as well as of König, of Clairaut as well as of her intimate friend Voltaire. And it is doubtful that any one of these men, despite all admiration for her aptness, ever felt inferior to her.

10

Voltaire is the only one who speaks as if she had led him to the study of sciences, and who again and again called her a prodigy scarcely even mentioning her name without attributing to her genius.

Tu m'appelles à toi, vaste et puissant génie,
Minerve de la France, immortelle Emilie,
Je m'éveille à ta voix, je marche à ta clarté.

However, the term "genius" was more liberally used at that time than now, when it is understood to mean the most outstanding intellects of mankind. In the eighteenth century the word was a medal to be pinned on the chest of any talented person.

Not always, however, does Voltaire sing of his Emily with such chaste formality. If one studies the great number of longer and shorter poems to his beloved, one finds many, especially in the early years of their relationship, in which admiration is mixed with a warm eroticism.

In the 48th Epistle he says: "Let him who will, my dear Urania, teach you to measure the earth, to read the sky and to lay before your genius problems for your eager eyes to master. My system is Ovid's, love is my theme and the soul of my verses."

Whatever he writes, to whomever he writes, he likes to weave into his verses a tribute to the mistress of Cirey.

In a poem to a young woman of Rouen, who in conjunction with Cideville has addressed to him an intelligent letter, and whose first name chances to be Emily, he praises Nature for producing two perfect creatures and giving them both the same name:

Je vois que la nature a fait
Parmi ses œuvres infinies
Deux fois un ouvrage parfait,
Elle a formé deux Emilies.

To the inquiry of Frederick of Prussia, as to what life was like at Cirey, he answers in polite verses that his friend and he tried to "follow your Highness' lead" and pattern themselves after Epicurus, cherishing all the arts and adoring Nature. But they follow their master at a great distance. The proportion between him and themselves is as if the God of day were to send a ray into a dark room and thus by his pure light give them the miniature picture of a majestic landscape.

Jardins, il faut que je vous fuie,
Trop d'art me révolte et m'ennuie.
J'aime mieux ces vastes forêts;
La nature, libre et hardie,
Irrégulière dans ses traits
S'accorde avec ma fantaisie.

This poem, by the way, contains one of those sudden quirks, not at all uncommon in Voltaire, in which he—long before Jean Jacques—glorifies wild nature at the expense of all art and self-conscious landscape gardening:

Out of dozens of little poems to Emily, let us examine a few. Most of them are humorous, but not once, even in jest, is his adoration, or at least his flattery forgotten. The following lines, from the first year of their acquaintance, are significant:

L'esprit sublime et la délicatesse,
L'oubli charmant de sa propre beauté,
L'amitié tendre et l'amour emporté
Sont les attraits de ma belle maîtresse.

Nicest of all is the following motto Voltaire composed for Madame du Châtelet:

Du repos, des riens, de l'étude,
Peu de livres, point d'ennuyeux,
Un ami dans la solitude,
Voilà mon sort; il est heureux.

"Happiness" is his constant refrain in the letters and verses of all these years: Cirey is an Eden; happiness is in Cirey. For instance read this impromptu, written one moonlight night in the garden:

Astre brillant, favorable aux amants!
Porte ici tous les traits de ta douce lumière:
Tu ne peux éclairer, dans ta vaste carrière,
Deux cœurs plus amoureux, plus tendres, plus constants.

In little poems the concentration of which would delight a Japanese, Voltaire succeeded in combining sincerity and wit. They are works of art, like those gems of ancient Greece and Rome which reproduce accurately and delicately the likeness of a woman or a man, on the surface of a semi-precious stone no larger than a finger nail. These two epigrams are deliberately paired. The first accompanied a ring into which his portrait was engraved:

Barier grave ces traits déslinés pour vos veux;
Avec quelque plaisir daignez les reconnaître!
Les vôtres dans mon cœur furent gravés bien mieux,
Mais ce fut par un plus grand maître.

On receiving her portrait he answered, varying his expression:

Traits charmants, image vivante
Du tendre et cher objet de ma brûlante ardeur!
L'image que l'amour a gravé dans mon cœur
Est mille fois plus ressemblante.

Voltaire does not hesitate to abase himself to call himself a step-child of Nature, in comparison to her who has every gift the gods can bestow; but when she loves him the balance is reëstablished:

Esprit, raison, beaux yeux, charmant visage,
Fleur de santé, doux loisir, jours sereins,
Vous avez tout, c'est là votre portage.
Moi, je parais un être infortuné,
De la nature enfant abandonné,
Et n'avoir rien semble mon apanage:
Mais vous m'aimez, les dieux m'ont tout donné.

Fully persuaded of his happiness, above the door into his hall he had engraved the words:

Asile des beaux arts, solitude où mon cœur
Est toujours demeuré dans une paix profonde,
C'est vous qui donnez le bonheur
Qui promettait en vain le monde.

He jeopardized his good fortune several times by journey and thoughtlessnesses. His nature demanded more variety than Emily's.

11

The dedication to *Alzire* begins thus:

"Madame.

"What a poor tribute to you is a poetic work like this, that lives only for a time, whose value is fixed by the transitory favor of the public, and which then vanishes into the darkness of oblivion.

"What is a trifling romance written in verse, to you, who can read treatises on geometry as easily as others read novels; to you, who found in Locke, the wise teacher of mankind, her own feelings and the expression of her own ideas; to a lady who is at the same time a model of Beauty and a champion of Truth!"

But—Voltaire goes on—the genius is greatest who does not disdain any of the fine arts; happiest is the spirit, which enjoys the niceties of Cicero and Bossuet, of Vergil and Tasso, after having found enlightenment in Clarke and Newton. And such is her genius.

There was a time—he continues—when in France women believed they were acting contrary to the nature of their sex by seeking to acquire knowledge. The ridicule which great men like Boileau and Molière heaped upon learned ladies, seems a barbaric prejudice. Boileau wrote a satire ridiculing a lady because she understood astronomy. It would have been better had he understood it himself. She, who stands so high in scientific attainment, has at the same time an appreciation of every sort of poetry; thus she pays as great a compliment to literature as Queen Christine and the Duchess of Maine did by loving it as one of the greatest of the fine arts.

Alzire was performed for the first time in January, 1736, and had a great success. The play was given twenty consecutive times, which was an unusual run; it earned more than 53,000 livres, a sum which Voltaire, to show his gratitude to the actors turned over to them, as he did the royalties from subsequent performances.

It seems to have interested the French deeply that

the scene of the play was laid in America, whose natives had never before been seen on a French stage. It was Voltaire's aim, as in *Zaïre,* to arouse disgust with cruelty and fanaticism and he could not have found a better subject than the Spanish invasions in America. The atrocities committed in 1517 by Cortez in Mexico, and in 1525 by Pizarro in Peru, were well chosen to show the barbarity and intolerance of the Christian conquerors.

12

The first few years at Cirey were highly satisfactory and happy ones for both parties. Now and then, however, there was a cloud. The reason was to be looked for partly in Voltaire's fears of sentence to prison, partly in his restlessness, which called for change and adventure.

The main cause of his journeys, however, was the persecution to which his compositions were subject. Looked at with the eyes of an enlightened posterity, they were as a rule very innocent; at the time, they offered excellent excuse for government interference.

Le Mondain, one of Voltaire's most popular compositions, was written in the year 1736, immediately after the great success of *Alzire.* Nowhere is he more reminiscent of Horace and Ovid; one can even say that the entire poem has for text these verses from Ovid's *Ars amatoria:*

> Prisca juvent alios! ego me nunc denique natum
> Gratulor. Hæc ætas moribus apta meis.

Le Mondain mocks those who praise the old times, the golden age, in which people went around naked and ate acorns. Voltaire is frank to admit he likes his own era, even though it is called the iron age; it is an age of new comforts and cleanliness, new demands and new joys, unknown to his barbaric ancestors:

> O le bon temps que ce siècle de fer!
> Le superflu, chose très nécessaire,
> A réuni l'un et l'autre hémisphère.

Adam and Eve had long, dirty nails, unkempt hair, no knives and forks and no good bed. They knew no sanitation, and without cleanliness even the happiest love is not love but an instinct to be ashamed of:

> Sans propreté l'amour le plus heureux
> N'est plus amour, c'est un besoin honteux.

The much praised state of nature, to tell the truth is not very attractive, compared to the life led by civilized people. It is better to enjoy the paintings of the gentle Correggio and the skilled Poussin, the statues of Bouchardon, the jewel setting of Germain, better to live in rooms whose walls are covered with Gobelin tapestries, than to dwell in the garden which became famous because of the Devil and the apple.

One hardly can believe it! But at that time it was criminal to joke about our early ancestors' ignorance of the virtues of bathing or to make fun of the legend of Eve and the snake. And yet what right has a modern Dane like myself to be astonished at this, when as late as the year 1891 my own Danish government prosecuted the editor Henrik Pontoppidan because he had published in his paper a humorous variation of the story of the creation of Eve. But Denmark, unlike Holland and Switzerland, never was a country in which one could expect to find freedom in religious matters.

Voltaire sent *Le Mondain* to the Bishop of Lucon. When the Bishop died the same year, it was found in one of his drawers; copies were circulated and soon the poet was informed that he was to be seized for punishment.

Thus his flight became a necessity. Emily wept bitterly when they parted. Only one consideration made a short separation desirable: certain puritanic and malicious relatives of the mistress of Cirey resented her living with Voltaire while her husband was at the wars, and they threatened to send the husband a letter of complaint. Although the Marquis had not the least resentment and always kept the same friendship for his wife and for Voltaire this interference on the part of outsiders might have put him in a difficult position.

13

Voltaire traveled via Brussels to Antwerp, thence to Amsterdam and Leyden. In Holland he was safe, and he was welcome; here he could watch over the printing of his books and make corrections on the spot. Just then his great work *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton* was being printed.

All Madame du Châtelet's efforts were bent on stopping the persecution of Voltaire. She induced her friends to apply to the Treasurer, Monsieur de Chauvelin, and she herself made a naïve attempt by confessing frankly to him how indispensable Voltaire had become to her. In December, 1736, she writes to her friend d'Argental: "The Treasurer knows the bond that unites us; he is aware that my friend's desire for a quiet life with me will hold him in check. Now, what pleasure can he find in filling our lives with bitterness!"

The warm-hearted woman saw her problem in keeping Voltaire from being careless. She recognized that restraint was the condition upon which they might have a happy future. But she suffered tortures trying to restrain a poet and writer of Voltaire's incalculable temper. Paris was still avid for copies of *Le Mondain,* when the rumor of the hundred times more dangerous *Pucelle* started.

A month later Madame du Châtelet writes to d'Argental: "At every moment I have to save him from himself and I use more diplomacy in guiding him than the Vatican does to subdue all Christendom."

When Voltaire reached Brussels, he found the rumor circulated by Jean Baptiste Rousseau, that he had come with the sole purpose of preaching atheism. For this reason he stayed only one day, so his admirers had *Alzire* performed that evening. Madame du Châtelet writes of that to d'Argental: "His laurels follow him everywhere. But what good is all this honor to him! Real happiness in obscurity would be worth far more. How vain is mankind, how blind the soul!" The last she says in a Latin quotation:

O vanas hominum mentes! o pectora cæca!

Of course on this journey Voltaire traveled under an assumed name. He was Monsieur Révol, merchant. He received his letters under this name, and had them addressed to the firm of Ferrand Arty in Amsterdam, and to the banker Hellin in Leyden. True, his incognito was harder to preserve than a king's.

In Leyden crowds collected to see him; twenty young Englishmen of the Court of King George visited him in a body. In Amsterdam, where he lived with a book-dealer named Ledet, he was flooded with tributes from all sides. One of the municipal authorities translated *La Mort de César* and dedicated the translation to him. His *Brutus* had long since been translated into English; now the translation of *Zaire* was staged in York Buildings, which one of Voltaire's enthusiastic admirers, Mr. Bond, rented for that purpose. Bond playing the part of Lusignan, and several of his enthusiastic friends in other rôles, gave an excellent performance. The sixty-year-old Mr. Bond having put his whole soul into the part he played, collapsed after the first performance and died at once. Such fanatic adorers of Voltaire were these amateurs, that they could not be scared off even by this incident; another at once took over the part of the deceased and the next day the tragedy was played again on the improvised stage, with a prologue in honor of the deceased and of the poet.

All these honors reported to Voltaire from England and those received daily in Holland, together with the job of proof-reading his book on Newton's philosophy, kept this susceptible poet and diligent worker so busy that he rather neglected the correspondence with his friend in Cirey.

How hurt she was by this is shown by a letter she wrote to d'Argental in February, 1737. It is so long that it is impracticable to quote it in its entirety. But no other document shows as clearly the depth of honest love in the character of the Marquise.

In the first pages she assures d'Argental of her absolute confidence. She knows his heart. She re-

proaches herself for letting Voltaire depart, though she does not mention his name; but she had thought it impossible to keep him at Cirey without the knowledge of the government. Now she wants d'Argental to tell her by what subterfuges he might be able to stay there. Could he stay with her under a different name? That would be embarrassing for him. But if d'Argental thought it necessary it would be done. Could he stay at Cirey openly? One thing in its favor is that just now very few people from Champagne are likely to be run across at the castle. Besides she finds it better for them to be together in Cirey than anywhere else. It would be best if he returned there. No inconveniences would be entailed by this, unless her malicious relatives should carry out their threat and write "that wretched letter" to Monsieur du Châtelet. When he is not at Cirey she cannot watch his conduct so well, and show him the pitfalls that open under him as soon as he misbehaves. Then she gives vent to the fears which clutch her tortured heart, the fears that he may never return at all. In her letters she has reproached him so fiercely that he either answered coolly and formally or not at all.

"I have just received a letter which makes me fear that he will not return; I am very depressed about it. Now I must confide to you the worst: I fear that he feels far more guilty toward me than toward the ministry. Now we shall see if he comes; but I repeat I do not think he will, and I swear to you that I do not believe my strength capable of bearing it. I shall lose him for once and all, don't doubt it! But who can save him from his own will! I have nothing to reproach myself with; that is one consolation, but a very poor one. I was not born to be happy. I do not dare to ask anything of you; but I wish you would try one last attempt to touch his heart. Write him that I am very ill, that I want to let him know it, and that he owes it to me to return, at least to prevent my death. I assure you that after all this is no exaggeration; for the past two days I have had fever. My wild imaginings can kill me if this keeps up for two more days.

"I deserve far more sympathy than ever before. It

is humiliating for me to have to complain about him; it is a torture I never knew before. If you still have a little pity for me, write him; he will not risk having to blush before you. I ask you for this on my knees.

"He sends me the first proofs of this miserable book *Eléments de la Philosophie.* I tell you he thinks only of that. But he will be ruined if it is published in Holland. If he must be ruined he ought at least to know what dangers he is running. On my knees I beg you, write him emphatically, that, if he will not give in and return, he is hopelessly lost; this is my firm belief. If, as you say, his life's happiness or unhappiness depends on his reasonable and careful behavior, he must not be left to himself for even a moment.

"If you had seen his last letter you would not judge me harshly. Its signature is formal, and he calls me Madame. This is so oddly different from old times that my head was dizzy. Write to him at Brussels!

"Monsieur du Châtelet is nagging me to go with him to the wedding of the Princess (Elizabeth-Therese) in Lorraine; but I do not want to. A wedding and a Court would make me desperate. The place which speaks to me of our friend, is the only place I can live."

The letter is much longer and pictures the torture with which Madame du Châtelet pays for having let herself become so attached to a man that he became everything to her, while she means only something to him, not everything, especially not when he was traveling with "his mistress, glory," as Saint-Lambert said of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Emily could never get used to his absence. Another time she writes:

"I am one hundred and fifty miles away from my friend and it is twelve days since I have heard from him. Excuse me, excuse me! But I am in a terrible state.

"Two weeks ago I was in torture if I let two hours pass without my seeing him; I wrote to him from my room to his. And now two weeks have gone by, and I don't know where he is or what he is doing; I haven't even the sad consolation of sharing his mis-

fortune. Forgive me for boring you with my lamentations; but I am too unhappy!"

She could no more get used to his ambition, his love of glory than she could to these absences. She saw that fame was and remained his real mistress, his dearest beloved. But she could not believe that he was willing to risk obvious dangers, only to be read and admired by the public. One should read the following very characteristic fragment of a letter:

"If a friend, whom he had known for twenty years, had asked him for the manuscript, he would have refused; and he sends it to someone he has scarcely met, a prince! Why in the world put his security in someone else's hands, so unnecessarily? It must be out of pure, foolish vanity (there is no other word for it): to show his metaphysics to a man who cannot appreciate it and is bound to see in the work nothing but its indiscretions! Any man who has no more sense than to blurt out his secret deserves to be betrayed. But I, what have I done to him that he should make my life's happiness dependent upon this Prussian? I tell you I am beside myself."

Poor woman! It was not easy to be unmarriedly wedded to Voltaire, and it is not surprising that in the course of a decade her love for him was exhausted, even though no other woman ever filled his mind or obscured Emily in his eyes.

14

Even when he had grieved her so much by addressing her as Madame and signing his letter formally, he nevertheless promptly granted her request, interrupted his corrections on the book on Newton and quickly returned to Cirey; there he was forgiven at once and—like an insect sensing danger—played dead. He had his letters addressed to him there under the name of Madame d'Azilli.

When Monsieur du Châtelet went to Paris, where he had to interview Cardinal Fleury, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet gave him letters for d'Argental. Voltaire writes in his:

"I have not dared to write you since I came again to Cirey, and you will understand that I have not written to anybody. I confess to you that, had it not been for the friendship that called me back, I would have spent the rest of my days in a country where I am at least safe from my enemies. . . . In France I can expect nothing but persecution; that is all the reward I shall get here. I should avoid living on French soil, were it not that the tenderness and the great qualities of the one who draws me back cause me to forget that I am here. . . . I make myself a voluntary slave, to live with her beside me. Everything else amounts to nothing. . . . I have always told you that even if my father, my brother, or my son were the Prime Minister of a despotic state, I would leave the state the next day. . . . But Madame du Châtelet, of course, is more to me than father, brother and son."

Madame du Châtelet, on the same occasion wrote a long letter, which begins thus:

"Our friend sends you, my dear friend, a melancholy letter; but his situation is really abominable. You know that his temper is passionate; but his love for you is passionate, too. I dare to take upon myself the responsibility for his continued careful behavior, at least as long as I am so happy as to have him where I can speak to him. . . . I believe that the return of your friend has saved him from a trap into which he was just about to be betrayed by his customary goodness and politeness. Please do not say anything about that in your letters to me as I show them to him; but just repeat your advice to him, to be cautious about having *Newton* printed in France, and to keep *La Pucelle* locked with a hundred keys."

Two daughters of Voltaire's sister had become fatherless and he and his brother took charge of them. Voltaire would have liked to marry the older of them to a son of Madame de Champbonin, a near relative, whom he esteemed highly and who had settled in Cirey with him. But the young girl preferred to choose for herself. She married, as told above, a young officer who had become military in-

tendant. They visited Cirey shortly after their marriage.

For those who are familiar with Madame du Deffand's and Madame Delaunay de Staël's spiteful descriptions of Madame du Châtelet, it will be of great interest to read that this young niece, angry at seeing Voltaire estranged from her and her family by his relations with the Marquise, says vicious things about her and the establishment at Cirey. The young woman writes naïvely:

"I am desperate; I believe him lost to all of his friends; he has fettered himself so that, it seems to me, he will never be able to break his chains. They live in an awful, inhuman solitude. Cirey is situated four leagues (two and a half miles) from the nearest habitation, in a region where one sees nothing but mountains and untilled land. They are deserted by nearly all of their friends and have almost no one from Paris with them.

"That is the life the greatest genius of the century is leading—true, it is with a woman who is highly talented and very pretty, and who employs every conceivable trick to hold him.

"There are no ornaments she does not wear, and no passage from any of the greatest philosophers she cannot quote, to please him. Everything will be lost; He seems more bewitched than ever before. He has furnished a nice apartment for himself with a dark-room for physical experiments. The theatre is very pretty; but no comedy is ever played because there are almost never actors. (Only nine months later Madame de Graffigny writes that within twenty-four hours the inmates themselves rehearsed and played thirty-three acts, of tragedy, comedy, and opera.) But all traveling stock companies that come within six miles have orders to appear at the chateau. Everything possible was done to get hold of one of these during our visit; but the best we got was marionettes, though on the whole they were rather good ones. We were given a splendid reception."

Voltaire, as we saw, interrupted the printing of his *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton* in Holland, hoping to get permission for the publication of

the book in France. But the chancellor, d'Aguesseau, an educated man of no character, thought it impious to criticize Descartes who, although it was not long ago that he, too, was exiled, had now been declared infallible. Voltaire wrote: "Apparently a poor Frenchman is not allowed to express his belief in the proven existence of a general gravitational force, or of a vacuum in space, or that the earth is flat at the poles, and that Descartes' theory is absurd." Cautious of book-sellers, he refused to give Ledet the end of his manuscript and thought he had thus secured himself against the possibility of the book's coming out without his sanction, in case the government refused to give its permission.

He had not reckoned with the slyness and greediness of the book-seller. The latter engaged a mathematician to finish the manuscript, and published it as if all of it were by Voltaire. In order to increase the sales he went so far as to supplement the title *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton* with the subtitle: *mis à la portée de tout le monde* (made understandable for everyone), which Abbé Desfontaines cleverly misread as *mis à la porte de tout le monde* (shown the door by everyone).

Even Voltaire's worst enemies, the editors of the ecclesiastical journal in Trevoux, acknowledged the astonishing ability he showed in this work, to make clear the most difficult and obscure things. As they remarked, Newton had been buried for twenty-seven years in the warehouse of the publisher who had dared to print his work; but now with Voltaire's explanation he was resurrected. Newton knew how to measure, calculate, and weigh, not how to talk. Thousands of English, German, Hollandish, Russian scholars had probed into his depths, had penetrated the dark, interpreted understandingly, explained intelligently, and produced admirable works. But these distinguished men, also, had not known how to talk, except academically. Newton remained a secret whispered by the initiated among themselves. Then came Voltaire, and Newton was understood; all Paris echoed Newton, stammered Newton, studied Newton, got acquainted with Newton.

15

At that time Voltaire had numerous troubles. The publisher Jore had caused him much anger and had gone so far as to attack his honor. Finally Jore wrote a letter of apology, begging to be forgiven and declaring that he had acted as he had under the influence of Voltaire's enemy (probably Abbé Desfontaines), "of the enemy whom you very well know." Another, similar case was that of Demoulin who speculated in the grain market for Voltaire. Demoulin cheated him out of 24,000 livres and then had the impudence to threaten him with the "surrender of his secrets," if he complained. Only when he saw that Voltaire could not be intimidated, he had his wife write and ask forgiveness. Voltaire, who never grieved over the loss of money, forgave the debt, but demanded a letter in which Demoulin had to apologize for his impertinent threats.

These attacks by Jore and Demoulin meant nothing to Voltaire. He was far more hurt by the stubborn attacks of Abbé Desfontaines.

Of the work on Newton, Desfontaines wrote:

"It would be ridiculous for a philosopher to give up philosophy late in his life, to take up poetry. But, on the contrary it is quite all right for a poet at such an age to turn his back on verse in order to become a philosopher. It is disgraceful for an old man to want to be a poet (*turpe senes vates*). I am not one of those who find it unreasonable that Monsieur de Voltaire has finally grown tired of rhyming his thoughts and measuring his words, and that he is trying to ennoble his mind by rising to the heights of philosophy. But it is a pity that he has allowed himself to be taken in by this Newtonianism which is bad physics and is rejected by all good thinkers in Europe. Besides, one has to be a born geometrician or physicist to make any real headway in these sciences, just as one has to be a born poet to take honors on Parnassus."

And he goes on: The first successes Voltaire has had in science have filled him with such joy that he

thought he could teach others. But he was no good as scholar and he has chosen a path which is only leading him astray.

How impudent the Abbé becomes is best shown by this: He writes that in his *Eléments* Voltaire gave a rule for dividing an angle into three parts with a pair of compasses; as a matter of fact the book does not say a word about it. He evidently did not read the book.

Finally Voltaire lost patience with him and wrote a short pamphlet entitled *Le Presérvatif*, in which he takes up the various criticisms of the Abbé point by point, and proves about thirty faults and errors. Not content with the purely literary quarrel, he also takes up, in order to hit Desfontaines the more surely and deeply, his personal relations with him. But as he was in no position to start a feud with a Desfontaines, and as for various reasons he always tried to assure himself of anonymity, he induced a certain Chevalier de Mouhy to let his name appear on the pamphlet, the title page of which showed Desfontaines kneeling in the prison at Bicêtre being beaten black and blue by a lusty fellow with a lash.

This Chevalier de Mouhy, one of the numerous starved literary adventurers of that time, had long received financial support from Voltaire. He got a yearly stipend for literary correspondence with which he supplied the poet. As always in such cases Voltaire was so naïve as to believe his authorship was hidden by leaving the responsibility to a dummy. Actually this was impossible, as the decisive point of the pamphlet permitted no doubt that Voltaire was behind it all.

In the twenty-seventh section of the book, the author is made to say that as Desfontaines in his *Observations sur les Écrits Modernes* had attacked Monsieur de Voltaire and had boasted of a letter which Voltaire was supposed to have written him, the author had taken the liberty of writing to Monsieur de Voltaire, although he did not know him personally, and had received the following answer:

"I have known Abbé Guyot Desfontaines since 1724, when Monsieur Thiriot introduced him to me

as a former Jesuit, who had therefore done some studying. I welcomed him as I welcome all who interest themselves in literature. Fourteen days later I was surprised to receive a letter from him dated from the prison in Bicêtre where he was confined. I learned that three months before had been in le Châtelet for the same crime of which he was now accused. . . . I was fortunate enough at that time to have several influential friends whom death has since taken away from me. Ill as I was, I hurried to Fontainebleau to throw myself at their feet; I plead with them; I saw everybody. Finally I succeeded in having him freed and having the charge against him dropped, thus saving his life. I secured permission for him to go to my friend, the President de Bernières, in the country. He moved out there with Monsieur Thiriot. Do you know what he did when he got there? He wrote a libel against me. He even showed it to Monsieur Thiriot, who forced him to throw it into the fire. He asked my forgiveness, insisted that the libel had been written before he entered the prison of Bicêtre. I was weak enough to forgive him, and this weakness won me a deadly enemy, who wrote anonymous letters against me and sent twenty libels against me to Holland. This is a part of what I have to tell you about him."

Voltaire could have added that it had been Desfontaines who had denounced his *Le Mondain* to the government.

What he said here was the pure truth; but it was sufficient to enrage Desfontaines and to kindle in him a desire for revenge. In the same year he published, anonymously like Voltaire, his viciously offensive, lying and vulgar reply, called *La Voltairomanie, ou Lettre d'un jeune Avocat.*

That Voltaire wrote *Le Préservatif* was certainly not in conformity with the ideas of Emily. It stirred her contempt that he should waste time and strength in engaging with the rabble. When he wrote a play to attack Desfontaines—*L'Envieux,* in which Ariston, representing Voltaire, is very noble, and Zoïlin, representing Desfontaines, extremely vulgar—she hoped devoutly that it would never be performed at

the Théâtre Français. And it was not. It was submitted anonymously and rejected by the actors who did not imagine who the author was.

16

Desfontaines—except for Jean Baptiste Rousseau —stands first of the group of the professional haters and attackers of Voltaire, a large number, notably: Fréron, La Beumelle, Nonotte, Saint-Hyacinthe, Clément (le Dijon), and many others.

The most important among them belong to the literary class of spongers, who through insatiable envy attack some great personality and make their living by their hatred. Envy inspires such people, gives them, sterile as they may be in themselves, a certain fecundity, sometimes even a little wit, and always that constant malice, that gift of distortion which makes a writer widely read. Externally, too, their hate gives them a certain position; the public, capable of but little judgment, regards them as the "opponents" of the one whom they attack, just as a sort of anti-Pope—incredible as it sounds—gets himself thought of as equal to the Pope.

The hostile parasites who sucked Voltaire's blood were of various kinds. None of them had any honor, except the hard-headed and ignorant Jesuit Nonotte, a pedant whose name has been made a word of the French language by Victor Hugo. Most detestable, because of his unbounded impudence, was perhaps La Beaumelle, who knew Denmark before he knew France, and who in his youthful self-conceit had insulted Holberg before he insulted Voltaire. The one who had the most brains was Fréron, who owed his chief notoriety to Voltaire's passionate defence. He did not lack wit. Also, he was the only one who had something, that—with some good will—could be called talent. He had an unmatched perseverance. The number of volumes he published as a magazine editor is prodigious, outnumbering even Voltaire's output. But of all Fréron wrote nothing has lasted but a few taunts against Voltaire.

17

Guyot Desfontaines was born in 1685, at Rouen, studied and taught under the Jesuits, became tired of it, and took shelter with the powerful Cardinal d'Auvergne. He was a sort of court fool for the clerical prince who patronized literature. Desfontaines obtained the position of a priest in Thérigny, Normandy.

But celebrating Mass was not his idea of pleasure; and he gave this up to practise the literary profession. He wrote an ode on the foolish use made of life, and several bad psalms, and a "critical" essay expressing his disgust with French poetry.

La Motte, too, had expressed himself against poetry in general, and had advanced arguments which are often repeated in the history of literature. He calls versification a mechanical and ridiculous business: everything could be said just as beautifully and effectively in prose; the only sensation of pleasure verse can give is that of a difficulty overcome; the art of the rhymester is like the art of the mountebank.

La Motte, however, wrote his tragedy *Ines de Castro* in verse, and it had a success; Voltaire said of it that it was "one of the most interesting dramas on the stage." Its verses, it is true, were not harmonious, and Desfontaines criticized the play severely. Voltaire's criticism was more humorous. When La Motte, speaking of *Œdipe,* said to him: "It is the finest theme in the world; I must put it into prose," Voltaire answered: "Do that; and in return I shall put your *Ines* into verse."

We have seen that Desfontaines stole and published Voltaire's *La Ligue,* thinking that the poet would not dare to claim his rights as author, and that he interwove verses of his own. But in order to see Desfontaines in the full light, one must know that he had the coolness, while in prison, to write a pamphlet criticizing the very verses smuggled into *La Ligue* by Desfontaines himself.

Desfontaines had just taken over France's oldest critical review, the *Journal des Savants,* when he had

the misfortune to mistake a chimney-sweep for Cupid. He was caught, you remember, and came very near to death at the stake. One feels the vast difference between the modern attitude toward sexual abnormalities and the morbid interest of the eighteenth century. Not only was the punishment horrible; but we are amazed at the freedom with which it is referred to and joked about, in literature. One need only read two epigrams by Jean Baptiste Rousseau. Here is one:

> En un marché passaient avec maint sbirre
> Deux Florentins que pour crime on brûla
> Crime galant tel que l'aurez pu lire
> Du beau Catulle et de Caligula.

Another starts:

> Un vieux paillard qu'à Rome on accusait
> De pratiquer l'amour antiphysique
> Vit à Paris un prestre qu'on cuisait
> Pour mesme cas dans la place publique.

And both end with jokes which hardly bear repeating. In the last poem it is emphasized that what is called crime in Paris, is, in Rome, a matter of which nobody thought anything.

We have seen that the stake was inevitable for Desfontaines when Voltaire saved him and the death penalty was changed to exile.

Desfontaines wrote to him:

"I will never forget how infinitely I am obliged to you. Your heart is worth even more than your head, and you are the most active friend a man ever had. The zeal with which you came to my aid honors me, somehow, more than the malice and hatred of my enemies has shamed me by the unworthy treatment I had to suffer."

And he begs Voltaire to complete the rescue by having recalled the *Lettre de cachet* which exiled Desfontaines eighteen miles from Paris.

Voltaire's goodness went so far that he wrote a petition for the annulment of the exile. When the matter dragged, he secured for Desfontaines permission to stay at the country seat of President de Ber-

nières, and continued his efforts to effect his readmission to Paris.

A second time Voltaire saved Desfontaines from imprisonment, which threatened because in the preface of a book on the trial of Père Girard and the pretty Cadière he said some sarcastic things about the *directeurs de conscience* and the parliaments.

Nevertheless, his attitude toward Voltaire remained that of a man who was not indebted to him for anything. In *Observations critiques sur le Temple du Goût* he attacked that poem. Voltaire answered him anonymously, but annihilatingly, in his *Discours sur l'Envie:*

Cent fois plus malheureux et plus infâme encore
Est ce fripier d'écrits que l'intérêt dévore,
Qui vend au plau offrant son encre et ses fureurs,
Méprisable en son goût, détestable en ses mœurs . . .
Chacun, avec mépris, se détourne de toi;
Tout fuit jusqu'aux enfants, et l'on sait trop pourquoi.

Every week Desfontaines published his *Observations* on the new books, and never again praised Voltaire.

Desfontaines suggested that it was Voltaire's aim to give a low estimate of the most famous writers, in order to appear himself the perfect author. A silly accusation, as Voltaire's criticisms of his predecessors, though free, are none the less admiring.

In a letter to Cideville (September 20, 1735) Voltaire says in grim jest: "I regret having freed him from Bicêtre and the Place de Grève. In the end it is better to burn a priest than to leave him free to bore the public."

Simultaneously with the student performance of *La Mort de César,* the play was printed—without Voltaire's knowledge and consent—and with numerous errors. Desfontaines wrote a damning review of it, which reveals his superficial education: He seriously reproaches Voltaire because all characters of the play say thou to each other, as if they were equals. Desfontaines seems to think that the Romans knew the polite "vous." He writes of Brutus: "This Roman is more like a Quaker than a Stoic [he apparently does not know that Quakers never carry

any weapons] and expresses the feelings of a monster rather than those of a hero." Plan, sequence, dialogue, style, thoughts, he insists are cut to the pattern of the English theater. Nothing in it really was in the least English.

Sensitive to criticism as Voltaire always was, he stooped so far as to write to Desfontaines, and this attempt to disarm and win the scoundrel by flattery is painful: he even asked the critic to let him know what mistakes he and his friends found with his works, so that he could correct them in the new edition.

But Desfontaines broke the armistice. Count Algarotti was about to go on an expedition, with Maupertuis, Clairaut, and several others, to Lapland to investigate whether the earth was flat on the poles or not, and before his departure Voltaire wrote him a private letter, a copy of which fell, owing to carelessness, into the hands of Desfontaines. He wished to publish the poem. Voltaire refused his consent. Desfontaines did it just the same. At the end of the letter Voltaire paid homage to his Emily in a way permissible in a private letter only:

Allez donc, et du pôle observé, mesuré,
Revenez aux Français apporter des nouvelles.
Cependant jé vous attendrai,
Tranquille admirateur de votre astronomie,
Sous mon méridien, dans les champs de Cirey,
N'observant désormais que l'astre d'Emilie.
Echauffé par le feu de son puissant génie,
Et par sa lumière éclairée,
Sur ma lyre je chanterai
Son âme universelle autant qu'elle est unique;
Et j'atteste les cieux, mesurés par vos mains,
Que j'abendonnerais pour ses charmes divins
L'Equateur et le pôle arctique.

The way in which the physical charms of Emily were praised as a possession which the poet would not exchange for all knowledge about the equator and the pole, aroused Monsieur du Châtelet as well as his wife. They were both about to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the circumstance that Desfontaines was threatened by a far greater

danger made them generously withhold their accusation.

It was the French Academy which attacked Desfontaines with all its power. In a pamphlet attributed to Abbé Ségui, were certain sharp invectives against the Academy, these were ascribed to Desfontaines; he swore on his honor in a letter read to the Academy that he had no part in the libel; but when cross-examined in court, he had to confess the authorship; he had sold the pamphlet to the publisher Ribou for three louis d'or.

Voltaire, not liking the Academy because it had not accepted him as member, was of the opinion that Desfontaines had good reasons for ridiculing it. But on learning that Desfontaines was in danger of being arrested and perhaps of ending his life as a galley slave, he wrote on January 29, 1736, from Cirey to Abbé Asselin: "I hear that Abbé Desfontaines is in trouble, and therefore I forgive him. If you know where he is, send him to me. I could be of help to him and he could learn from this kind of revenge that he should not have mocked at me."

Shortly before he had written the following biting verses on Desfontaines in the *Ode on Ingratitude:*

C'est Desfontaines, c'est ce prêtre,
Venu de Sodome à Bicêtre,
De Bicêtre au sacre vallon,
A-t-il l'espérance bizarre,
Que le bûcher qu'on lui prépare
Soit fait des lauriers d'Apollon?
Il m'a prit l'honneur et la vie,
Et dans son ingrate furie,
De Rousseau lâche imitateur,
Avec moins d'art et plus d'audace
De la fange où sa voix coasse
Il outrage son bienfaiteur.

With the aid of powerful protectors Desfontaines obtained his freedom. And when he spoke with warmth and admiration of Voltaire's tragedy *Alzire*, which had had so great a success on the stage, Voltaire for the time being omitted in his ode the stanzas on Desfontaines.

Desfontaines' criticism of Voltaire's drama *L'Enfant prodigue* was somewhat unfavorable, but mod-

erate. But while Desfontaines was thus being careful not to reveal his hatred, he forced Voltaire by his denunciation of him as author of *Le Mondain* to flee from his refuge in Cirey.

Then followed the foolish review of the book on Newton, Voltaire's anonymous publication of the pamphlet *Le Préservatif,* and Desfontaines' equally anonymous polemic *La Voltairomanie,* a collection of the crudest insults interwoven with the cleverest lies.

18

La Voltairomanie begins with a statement, by a young lawyer who is supposed to be the author, that Abbé Desfontaines is too firmly resolved to maintain the mildness and moderation he had always shown toward Voltaire, to stoop to answer his nasty and infamous pamphlet. He has left the matter to the young lawyer who so far has tried his poor eloquence only at the bar, but who is armed by the righteousness of his cause to appear against the bold writer to whom nothing is holy, neither morals, nor decency, neither truth nor religion. Voltaire is again and again exposed by his ignorance and senselessness. Abbé Desfontaines, whom he dared to attack, is a man of honor and a great writer. Voltaire's *Henriade* is a chaos with more grammatical mistakes than the book has pages; his *Charles XII* is a bad novel, written by a confused ignoramus who took the tone of a chatterbox; his *Eléments sur la Philosophie de Newton* is the argument of a school-boy who in his deep ignorance stumbles at every step—the book had exposed its conceited author to derision in France as well as in England; his *Philosophical Letters,* with their impudent remarks about religion, have been burned by a wise decree of Parliament.

Therefore, the lawyer continues, this author's life consisted, quite properly, in a series of chastisements. During the Regency he got a well-deserved beating in Sêvres. Then followed the famous flogging in front of Sully's palace. Still another bastonnade took place in London, where he was beaten by an English pub-

lisher (this is pure imagination) so that he had to beg for permission to return to Paris.

It is incredible, he says, that Voltaire has dared to warm up a disgraceful old accusation against Desfontaines, the falseness of which he himself once confessed (more pure imagination) in an apology that the deceased President de Bernières had ordered him to write. The President, though not Voltaire's friend—how could such a man be the friend of a peasant's son!—was a great gentleman who out of kindness let him stay for some time in his own house, but showed him the door in 1726, when Voltaire behaved impudently toward the Count de Rohan on the occasion of a chance meeting at the Opera.

Desfontaines, through the "lawyer's" mouth, denies positively that when he was in Bicêtre he wrote anything against Voltaire. Of Thiriot, he writes:

"Monsieur Thiriot is a man who is respected by honest people as much as Voltaire is abhorred by them. Against his will he still clings to the loyalties of an old friendship of which he is ashamed, but which he is too weak to break off altogether. Monsieur Thiriot has been asked by Voltaire to testify that Desfontaines wrote at Bicêtre a pamphlet against Voltaire and of course he had to answer that he knew nothing about it. So we have Voltaire concerned: the abbé's visit to President de Bernières took place in the holidays in 1725. If there exists a pamphlet against Voltaire printed in that year, let him show it! If he tries to answer that Abbé Desfontaines himself threw it into the fire, let him produce witnesses! For, so much is certain, that Voltaire is not to be trusted on his bare word. Monsieur Thiriot, he says, induced Desfontaines to throw the writing into the fire. And Monsieur Thiriot declares the story is untrue. Monsieur Voltaire therefore is the most rascally liar that ever existed."

19

Madame du Châtelet on this occasion proved herself a brave and sympathetic friend. As we can see

from her letters to the Count d'Argental, she was firmly resolved to keep Voltaire from knowing about the libel, fearing that his peace might be disturbed and his health upset. On the other hand it was impossible to leave it unanswered. It wouldn't do for Voltaire to defer the matter to Thiriot and have Thiriot leave him in the lurch. In this embarrassing situation she herself composed a reply which, as she flattered herself, was written with more moderation—though with less wit—than if Voltaire had done it. If one reads what she wrote, moderation does not seem to be exactly the outstanding feature.

In a private letter to d'Argental she says:

"My greatest wrath, I confess, is against Thiriot, and there is nothing I would not do to force him to this declaration which he owes to his friends' honor and to his own. I have written him already with my best ink, and if he does not now give Monsieur de Voltaire complete satisfaction, I will follow him to the end of the world to get it."

Meanwhile, however, the humorous and at the same time touching situation arose that, while Emily was doing everything in her power to keep the existence of the pamphlet a secret from her friend, he had already received and read it without saying a word about it to her, for fear it might hurt her too deeply.

Both believed that Thiriot was the only one who could testify to the existence of that (supposedly) burned pamphlet; for Thiriot, during his last stay in Cirey, had spoken specifically and with the greatest indignation about the occurrence, and that indignation was, as he saw, entirely shared by those present! Now he gave the Marquise such a lukewarm answer that she burned with anger. He wrote that he had recently been questioned over and over as to the circumstances surrounding a certain happening, i.e. that he had compelled the Abbé to burn the pamphlet; that he had invariably answered that he recalled the matter, but that he had forgotten the exact circumstances under which it took place, and hence it was impossible for him to give any account of them that after so many years this was not surprising. All he could remember was that at the house

of Bernières the conversation had turned to some polemic against Voltaire, a thing of forty or fifty pages, which Desfontaines showed him, and which Thiriot requested him to burn. He has forgotten when the pamphlet was written, and what its title was.

One sees from this answer Thiriot's cowardly attempt not to fall out with either Desfontaines nor Voltaire.

With the unbounded patience of his loving heart Voltaire still could not be angry with Thiriot. He assured him with the most touching expressions that he was not to break with Desfontaines, but only to write another, warmer, letter to Madame du Châtelet:

"In the name of our friendship, write her something that will make her heart more glad. You know the firmness and generosity of her character; she regards friendship as so strong and sacred a thing that to allow the least bit of politics to enter it seems to her a crime. . . . You seem to think it dishonorable to retract, to take back your statements. But is it not dishonorable to refuse to join in a fight for a friend? Is it not a still greater shame to flee in the midst of a battle? Friends who have known me for two days are burning to defend me, and you leave me in the lurch, you, a friend whom I have cherished for twenty-five years! . . . But, my friend, does one live only to eat a good supper? Does one live for himself alone? Is it not a fine thing, to vindicate one's taste and the choice of one's heart by standing up for a friend?"

In strong contrast to Thiriot's detestable scampering away was Madame de Bernières' behavior. In the most clear and uncompromising phrases she declares, in a letter for publication, that all statements made with regard to Voltaire's position at her house were lies and inventions. He was not merely tolerated there, but on the contrary had been a trusted friend and daily companion. Furthermore he would not accept their hospitality without reimbursement, and he had paid for his own and Thiriot's board.

Enlightening in regard to the situation in Cirey as well as in regard to the conception of the eighteenth century of the right of the individual to dispose of

himself, is the way in which the most manly character in Cirey, the husband of Emily, the Marquis du Châtelet, interfered, first turning to Thiriot, then to Desfontaines, whom he alone knew how to force to his knees.

One must recall how deeply Thiriot was indebted to Voltaire. The sale of the *Lettres Philosophiques* had brought him over two hundred guineas; he had secretly spent the whole amount he had collected for the subscription of the *Henriade*, money which Voltaire had to return to the subscribers when the book was forbidden. Only a year before (1738) Voltaire had slipped fifty louis d'ors into his portmanteau, when he returned from Cirey to Paris. And he, who had intercourse with Desfontaines, without a protest permitted the latter to accuse Voltaire of dishonesty in the publication of the *Henriade*, although he knew that the only two cheats in the whole affair were Desfontaines and himself.

The Marquis du Châtelet was no great stylist; but he was a man. He wrote from Cirey (January 10, 1739) to Thiriot:

"Monsieur, the extraordinary friendship I feel for Monsieur de Voltaire, as well as the friendship he, as I know, feels for you and of which he has given you considerable proof, induces me to demand that you discharge your obligation to this friendship. Your letters, which I have seen, in which you speak of the pamphlet shown to you by Abbé Desfontaines at the house of President de Bernières, in Rivière-Bourdet, do not allow me to believe that you can have had any part in what is said about the matter in a new pamphlet, entitled *La Voltairomanie*. But as this pamphlet attacks Monsieur de Voltaire in other important points, the letters of which I speak are not sufficient to fulfill what you owe to truth and to Monsieur de Voltaire; and I am sure that you will without hesitation do what the laws of decent society require of you. So you must kindly write me a letter following approximately the enclosed outline. You know that this outline contains nothing but the strict truth, and I leave it to your feelings to add anything

your heart and the gratitude I have observed in you, will dictate. You are under a greater obligation than anyone else, to defend the good name of the man whom Abbé Desfontaines accuses of rapacity, who, however, as you know well, has spent his life in giving pleasure to his friends, so that he is as well known for his generosity as for his writings.

"Regarding the lapse of memory which you claim to suffer in this affair, that can be shown a sham by printing the letters which are in the possession of Monsieur de Voltaire. These are to be worked up into a clear memorandum which all his friends, among whom I have the honor to count myself, have advised him to send to the Chancellor and to publish. In addition to the respect which you will earn by playing the part of a man and a true friend in this matter, you will win the full esteem of the one who calls himself, Monsieur,

"Your devoted and obedient servant,

"CHÂTELET."

La Voltairomanie was a great success in Paris. Although the pamphlet had been printed secretly in Holland, two thousand copies were sold in two weeks. In private circles Desfontaines did not deny his authorship; he read it to his friends, including some who were also friends of Voltaire, as Abbé Prevost, and Algarotti.

The lawyer, who was supposed to be the author of the pamphlet, gave him no trouble, because he did not exist. But Voltaire's position toward the pretended author of his own pamphlet was not so comfortable. For, the latter existed in flesh and blood. Monsieur de Mouhy, who had served as dummy and had made a very tidy sum out of the pamphlet, began blackmailing Voltaire with the threat of breaking his silence.

Mouhy and the Abbé Moussinot, Voltaire's regular representative, implored him to come to Paris, and fight the matter to a finish. Not because of the danger which a visit to the capital involved, but more probably because of his jealousy over Clairaut's presence in Cirey, Voltaire remained there. One day when

Madame du Châtelet and Clairaut, in spite of repeated summons, did not appear for supper, because, deeply absorbed in the solution of a mathematical problem, they had locked themselves up to be undisturbed, Voltaire ran up in a rage and with one kick broke open the door.

He had not the necessary coolness to leave behind a young rival.

There is no indication that Thiriot could be driven from his detestable reserve. The letters he wrote were returned to him by Madame du Châtelet, including his answer to her husband's letter, which was so unsatisfactory that she was afraid that if the Marquis saw it he would go to Paris and challenge him.

Desfontaines was summoned before the police commissioner; but when the latter saw Voltaire's letter in *Le Préservatif*, which was such an attack on Desfontaines' honor, he did not show any inclination to intervene. He suggested that Desfontaines should offer to apologize for *La Voltairomanie* if Voltaire would do the same for *Le Préservatif*.

But Madame du Châtelet's pride rebelled at this.

To end the matter, the Marquis went to Paris, went to Desfontaines and forced from him the following declaration:

"I herewith make it known that I am not author of the pamphlet entitled *La Voltairomanie*, that I absolutely disapprove of it, that I regard everything said in it about Monsieur de Voltaire as slanderous, and that I should consider myself dishonored had I even the least part in writing it, as I entertain for Monsieur de Voltaire the feelings of respect which his talents deserve and which the public brings him with such good reason."

20

From now on Desfontaines was on the down grade. His journal *Observations* was put under surveillance and censured, and at the slightest personal attack was in danger of being suppressed; hence it necessarily became steadily more colorless and boring.

But, like all scandal-writers, he was forced to write

something sensational. He picked a certain Abbé Gourné, Prior of Taverny, who in 1741 had published the first number of a *Géographie*. Desfontaines found pleasure in attacking it in two or three articles. The Prior was not at all content to suffer in silence: he replied, charging that Desfontaines had received money from certain Paris publishers to make the *Géographie* a failure, and he insisted that Desfontaines had said to him:

"I could easily stop the publication of your work—a matter which is for you so important. But I respect you and would like to put you under obligation. But you must help me a little. I live on my pen and as a critic I am the scourge of authors. Woe to him who does not write as I please!"

The Prior took this to mean he would have to give Desfontaines a free copy of his work. But the reviewer demanded seven copies, four louis d'ors, and a manuscript containing the history of Reims Cathedral. In return he promised to praise the *Géographie* at the expense of all other geographies. For the subsequent write-ups he would be content with his seven copies and one louis d'or: "I am, as you can see, not expensive, and I shall do you a friendly turn."

Gourné refused. Whereupon Desfontaines conspired with three booksellers to spread a rumor that Gourné's *Géographie* was finding no buyers. Should the Prior then insist on the contrary that he had sold and was still selling many copies, he was to be charged with violating the laws concerning the book trade.

When Gourné made all this public, Desfontaines complained to the police. The Prior's house was searched and the Prior put under arrest. Gourné now brought complaint to the Parliament, but at the same time Desfontaines sued him in the court of Châtelet. The Prior, however, obtained a resolution of the Parliament, which halted the court proceedings. The case, therefore, did not come to trial; and in October, 1743, Desfontaines' franchise for the publication of his *Observations sur les écrits modernes* was revoked.

To this extent Voltaire was revenged; true, the authorities had not intervened for his sake but on behalf

of the French Academy, which Desfontaines had challenged a second time by writing in the preface of his translation of Vergil: "It offends me more to hear a haughty crowd of people being praised than to see Augustus treated as a god by Ovid and Vergil."

This vague, unspecific allusion, added to the discourse in which Desfontaines had, seven years before, mocked the Academy, under an assumed name, was the last straw. Prior Gourné was only an excuse.

Desfontaines did not believe himself lost altogether. He began a new periodical, *Jugements sur les Ouvrages nouveaux.*

In 1745 he fell ill with pneumonia which developed into dropsy. He repented his sins and died.

21

Madame du Châtelet was a greater and more independent spirit than most women of her time, or of later times. She had none of the systematic prudery of the *"triste"* nineteenth century, and none of its hypocrisy. Nevertheless she cannot be called typical of the eighteenth century. She was thoroughly feminine, but without coquetry. Although a woman who could be absorbed by a single great passion, she was not of the spirit of her generation, not surreptitious like Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse or emotional like Mademoiselle d'Aïssé, but of a frankness that was shameless in the eyes of some.

Emily, in her mental outlook, in her learning, and in her feeling for Nature, was nearer the Italian women of the year 1500 than the French of 1740.

Like certain eminent ladies of the Renaissance she was shameless without being unchaste. She did not mind being seen naked by a lackey; she did not regard him as a man.

Madame du Châtelet's valet, Longchamp, tells in his memoirs of his first day in her service. In the morning when he and his sister, who was the chambermaid, entered the bedroom of the Marquise, Madame du Châtelet pulled back the coverlets and got up:

"While my sister was getting a chemise ready, Madame, standing in front of me, let her shirt fall down to her feet and stood there, naked as a marble statue. I was stupefied and did not dare to look at her, although, trained at the Court in Lorraine, I had had more than one opportunity to see ladies change their shirts; but not like this. As soon as Madame was dressed she ordered her supper, she ate only once a day, which was to be attended by two persons only, the Duc de Richelieu and Monsieur de Voltaire. . . . Several days later she rang the bell while she was in the bathtub; my sister was otherwise occupied and could not answer. Madame du Châtelet told me to take a kettle of boiling water that stood on the fire and pour it into her bath; the water had become too cold. When I approached her I saw that no salts had been added to the bath water, for it was very clear and transparent. The lady stretched open her legs so I could pour the boiling water more easily without scalding her. When I began to pour my glance fell on what my eyes had not sought. Bashful and standing as far off as possible, with my head turned away, I was so unfortunate as to have my hand tremble, pouring the water at random into the tub. 'Look out!' she cried boisterously, 'you are burning me!' So I was forced to look more closely and longer than I had wished. . . . I was not accustomed to such lack of constraint in the ladies I had served formerly."

Hypatia, in antiquity, surely used more restraint in front of a slave, learned and free from prejudice as she was. There was a certain modesty about a Greek intellectual in ancient Egypt as well as in Hellas, which was lost in the neo-classicism of the eighteenth century.

Hypatia knew Homer and Plato but not mathematics and physics. Madame du Châtelet did not feel the ameliorating influence of the Greeks, but on the other hand she had mastered the mathematical knowledge of her time. Although she never alluded in society to her mathematical abilities, at times she made use of them at the card table to solve the problems that arose. This, however, did not prevent her

losing a fortune in Fontainebleau at the Queen's card table one unlucky evening.

22

It has already been mentioned in the Overture that Voltaire's *Eléments de la Philosophie de Newton* was not an extract from Newton's *Principia* but an independent development of his discoveries in optics and astronomy. In its original edition (1738) the work was dedicated to Madame la Marquise du Châtelet, with a poem and a brief letter. The dedication was further elaborated and altered in 1741, and in 1745 it was replaced by the more important epistle which begins with the enthusiastic words:

"Madame!

"When first I put your name at the head of these *Philosophical Elements* I was studying with you. Since then you have soared to such a height that I can no longer follow. Now I am in the position of a grammarian who would subject Demosthenes or Cicero to an examination in the art of speech. I offer simple rudiments to one who has plumbed all the depths of higher geometry and who has given us our only translation and explanation of Newton. This philosopher won all the honor he deserved during his lifetime; he caused no envy, for he had no rival. The learned world was his apostle; the rest of the people admired him without making claim of understanding him. But the honor you gave him is doubtless the greatest he ever received."

The work which then and later was highly esteemed by experts for its clear exposition of difficult philosophic, physical and astronomic truths, is introduced by a metaphysical argument, the first deistic chapters of which were at that time well suited to pave the way for the book, but today act as a deterrent to reading it. They contain nothing but pure theology, today so obsolete—the supposedly rational theology of the eighteenth century, which was as bare of logic as the speculative dogmas of the nineteenth century. Now and then, though, one feels

vivid flashes of Voltarian sagacity. Take, for instance, the reflections on freedom of will. But where with remarkable clarity he elucidates Newton's discoveries in optics and physics, he stands at his height as an enlightener and educator. Here he popularizes the new ideas, the law of gravity, the universal force of attraction, the refraction of light rays; and he attacks the errors of his time.

But he was not content to stop at the description of the ideas of other scholars.

23

In 1738 the Academy of Sciences in Paris announced a prize contest for the best essay on the *Nature and Diffusion of Fire.*

Voltaire was eager to use the knowledge he had acquired from his ambitious natural science experiments and studies in Cirey, in a way which would draw public attention. The year before he had tried to find out from Maupertuis what prize contest the Academy of Sciences was planning. He said a friend of his was anxious to know. When the problem turned out to be so well suited to his studies and experiments, he promptly set to work on his paper.

In Cirey he had a dark-room and a laboratory containing a physical apparatus and the best chemical equipment the time afforded. He was the first to carry out an experiment, indicated by Newton, to prove that the reflection in a prism does not come to an end when the glass is surrounded by a vacuum instead of by air.

He tried to determine the nature of heat. He performed experiments, using every resource known at the time: first a balance, then a Réamur thermometer and a Munschenbroek pyrometer, not a modern heat-meter, but a measure by which one could observe how heated bodies expand.

Even about the progress of forest fires he made experiments on a large scale, expensive though they were.

Strangest of all—as mentioned in our first chapter

—was his observation that the same amounts of different fluids, such as oil, water, vinegar, of different temperatures, do not take an average temperature when mixed.

As Voltaire in pursuing his ideas regarding the oxidation of metals and the compound nature of air would have had to discover oxygen, he stood on the threshold of the discovery of the specific heat of matter. These experiments of Voltaire's, at a time when—as Condorcet, and later Dubois-Reymond remarked—chemistry in France had not even reached the stage of belief in the calory, have won him the highest esteem of natural philosophers of the present day.

24

The Marquise du Châtelet took part in the competition without letting on to Voltaire. In a letter to Maupertuis, of June 21, 1738, she begins by reproaching him for having gone to Saint-Malo, instead of Cirey, where she had counted on seeing him, and where he would have found the peace he longed for; indeed, peace had ruled there for three years; there he could have enjoyed alternately solitude and the company of two people who admired and loved him as he deserved. Then, after a discussion of how well he would get along with Frederick the Great, whom he later, to Voltaire's anger, so completely won, she informed him:

"I believe that you must have been very surprised at my keenness to compose an essay for the Academy. I wanted to test my ability incognito; for I flattered myself that my secret would be kept for ever. Monsieur du Châtelet was the only one I told, and he has kept such a close mouth that he didn't even tell you about it when he was in Paris. I was unable to do any experimenting, because I was working without the knowledge of Monsieur de Voltaire. The idea came to me only one month before the work had to be sent in; I could work at night only and I was further handicapped by a lack of experience. Voltaire's essay, which was almost finished before I began on mine,

infected me with the idea of competing in the same line. I began to work without knowing whether or not I would send in my essay and I said nothing to Monsieur de Voltaire because I did not want to blush for an action which I feared would displease him, especially since in my essay I opposed nearly all of his ideas. I confessed it to him only when I saw from the newspaper that neither he nor I had received a share in the prize. It seemed to me that a defeat shared with him would be honorable. Later I learned that his entry and mine, too, were among those admitted to the contest. That you, therefore, would read it was a thought which stimulated my courage.

"Instead of being angry at my secrecy, Monsieur de Voltaire thought only of being of use to me, and as he was quite satisfied with my work he asked me to have it printed. I hope to bring this about, especially if you would be so good as to write a line to Monsieur Dufay and Monsieur de Réaumur for me. Monsieur de Voltaire has written to both. Monsieur de Réaumur has answered with exquisite courtesy. . . . I am not surprised that you were pleased with Monsieur de Voltaire's essay; it is rich in sagacity, instructive experiments and tests. Nothing of that sort appears in mine and it is very natural that you have no recollection of it. Perhaps, if you were the one to read it, you will recall it if I tell you that it was essay number six, and stated that fire has no weight, that it is possibly neither spirit nor matter but a substance of an unknown nature, like the empty space whose existence can also be taken as proven but whose composition defies us."

The prize was divided between three other contestants, among whom was a mathematical genius, the then thirty-one-year-old Euler. The Marquise as well as Voltaire received honorable mention, and the Academy had their treatises printed after the three that had received the prize. But although among the judges were men like Réaumur and Dufat, as science has developed it is clear that Voltaire deserved the prize ever more than Euler and far more than the other two winners. One of these two, the Jesuit Lozeran de Fiesc, believed in the vortex of Descartes.

The third prize-winner, one Count Créquy, was a Cartesian also, and as the Academy was Cartesian, the success of the victors could easily be explained.

Madame du Châtelet's essay, written in eight nights during which she slept only one hour each, contained something thought extraordinary by the scholars of later times. She supposes that the colors of a spectrum contain heat in varying degrees, red being the warmest, and violet the coldest. Forty years later Rochon proved that she was right.

Voltaire ascribed his and the Marquise's defeat to the superstition of the Cartesian vortex. In a letter to Maupertuis, whom he politely calls his and her instructor, he says:

"You admit that it is funny. It is cruel that these confounded whirls should prove stronger than your pupils. . . . The essay on fire, composed by Madame du Châtelet, is full of things that would do credit to the greatest physicist, and she would have won the prize, were not this senseless and ridiculous phantom, the vortices, haunting their erudite heads."

The Academy consented to print the two essays. They appeared with a preface which said that both essays gave evidence of extensive research, wide acquaintance with the best physical works, and were full of true observations; moreover, No. 6 was written by a lady of high rank, Madame du Châtelet, and No. 7 by one of "our most prominent poets." Emily asked in vain, in a letter to the Academy, to remain anonymous: "I have a thousand reasons for asking it." Apparently she had only one, that it was supposed to be ridiculous for a woman to be learned.

Voltaire and she, by the way, were the objects on this occasion of a strange endorsement. A prior in the Sorbonne, who gave a lecture on Newton and his doctrine before a learned assembly, added a eulogy on Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, which contained the following expressions: "Newton's system is a maze, through which Monsieur de Voltaire has found his way by the aid of a thread which was put into his hands by the modern Ariadne. The Theseus and Ariadne of our own time are the more deserving of praise, for those in the Greek legend burned for each

other in a sensual love only, while these feel for each other an intellectual love only."

25

Voltaire's numerous essays on natural science, some in the *Dictionnaire philosophique,* some in *Singularités de la Nature,* bear witness to his independence of mind, which does not fear to question the decision of an authority, nor to confess to himself the limitation of his own knowledge.

However, as we have seen, his inclination to believe in the obvious sometimes made it impossible for him to understand truths a little deeper than the obvious, and led him to scoff where he should have seen that he was face to face with truth.

In his *Singularités de la Nature* he has a typical chapter (the twelfth) on shells and the theories for which they are responsible. He says that one sometimes comes across heaps of mussels, or petrified oysters, on high land. From this it has been claimed, in spite of the law of gravity, and in spite of the known level of the sea, that several million years ago the whole face of the earth was covered by the ocean. Although the waves never reach higher than fifteen feet above the coasts, it is argued that the sea covered mountains of 18,000 feet height. True, nobody denies that in the course of centuries great changes have taken place on our earth. It is physically possible—and involves no serious contradiction of the Bible—that the island Atlantis, as Plato describes, disappeared nine thousand years before his time. But that is not proof that the sea created the Caucasus, the Pyrenees and the Alps. It is said shells have been found on Montmartre and near Reims. But as to high mountains, he doubted it. He had had people search for them on St. Gotthard and on St. Bernard; but none were discovered.

One physicist had written to him that he had found a petrified oyster shell on Mont-Cenis. He is forced to believe it, and is only surprised that such shells were not found by the hundred. The lakes near by

abound in large mussels whose shells are very like those of the oyster. And now comes Voltaire's comic explanation of these findings:

"Is it, after all, so fantastic to suggest that there were countless pilgrims, with mussel shells on their hats, who wandered on foot from San-Jago in Galicia and from all other provinces to Rome? They come from Syria, Egypt, Greece, as well as from Poland and Austria. . . . One solitary oyster found on Mont-Cenis, therefore, does not prove that the Indian Ocean once covered all the land in our hemisphere."

He set his heart upon hygiene in an epoch when it had no consideration. In his little story *Le monde comme il va,* in which he makes the sage Babouc his mouth-piece, it is told how the wise man came to Persepolis (Paris) and what impression he received of the church-goers there:

"Babouc mixed in a mob, consisting of the ugliest and dirtiest of both sexes; this mob hurried with dull expressions into a great, gloomy hall. The constant murmur, the unceasing movement he observed, as well as the money some paid to be allowed a seat, at first made him think that this was a market where straw chairs were being sold; but when he saw several women fall on their knees and stare straight ahead it was clear to him that he was in a temple. Sharp, rough, ugly voices resounded under the vault . . . , so that he stopped his ears; but soon he was also tempted to stop his nose, when he saw laborers with hoes and shovels enter the temple. They lifted a large slab, and to the right and left they threw earth from which came a pestilential odor. Then they put a body into the opening and on top they replaced the stone. 'How,' said Babouc, 'these folks bury their dead in the same place in which they pray to their God! Can it be, they fill their temples with corpses! In that case I am no longer surprised at the pestilences which prostrate Persepolis so often. The rottenness of the dead and the smell of the living who pack into this place are sufficient to poison the globe.' "

Considering how pleased Voltaire's ancestors were

at the distinction of being buried in churches, one can feel the progress that had taken place with him.

26

Mademoiselle d'Issembourg d'Happoncourt came from a prominent and meritorious family. Her father was a Major in the guard of the Duke of Lorraine. Her mother, Marguerite Callot, was the grand-daughter of the famous painter and engraver, Jacques Callot. She was born in Nancy in 1695. At a very early age she was married to a chamberlain of the Duke of Lorraine, Huguet de Graffigny, a rough and violent man, who in his fits of uncontrolled temper almost beat her to death. We can still read a touching letter she wrote to her father, begging him to free her from this marriage.

She succeeded in obtaining her liberty, but after her separation she was so poor that she had but a few hundred francs. She had become companion of the young Mademoiselle de Guise, when Voltaire arranged the latter's marriage with the Duke de Richelieu; the Duchess, however, did not tie her so firmly to herself that she could not make a rather extended visit in Cirey. Not until the year 1820 were the letters put in order and published, which she had written to her friends from Cirey.

These letters are highly interesting in themselves; for they describe with the greatest accuracy everything that their writer did, saw and heard. We can share her experiences. Daily occurrences, quarrels, etc., are reproduced in such a way that one can almost hear the voices of the participants, listen to their mannerisms and their jokes. We hear Voltaire's reading of his writings, listen to one dramatic performance after another, both on the stage and off.

The tone of these letters is absolutely intimate; all persons to whom or about whom Madame de Graffigny writes, are called by their nicknames, of which the most popular have three or four. Most of the letters are addressed to a friend of Madame de Graffigny's youth, the harmless, phlegmatic Devaux. De-

vaux had been given a position as reader with King Stanislaw in Lunéville, at an annual salary of two thousand thalers. The story is that when Devaux was proposed to Stanislaw as a reader, he said: "What in the world do I want with a reader? I have about as much use for one as my son-in-law [Louis XV] has for a father-confessor."

Devaux is humorously pictured by King Stanislaw's almoner, Abbé Porquet, in a short poem which begins:

> Le ciel te prodigua tous les défauts qu'on aime;
> Tu n'as que les vertus qu'on pardonne aisément;
> Ta gaieté, tes bons mots, tes ridicules mêmes,
> Nous charment presque également.

In the letters Devaux is called Panpan or Panpichon. Madame de Graffigny uses the familiar pronoun in addressing him, as she does with all her friends. Among these is Saint-Lambert, later so celebrated as the author of *The Seasons* (*Les Saisons*), and also later on Voltaire's as well as Jean Jacques Rousseau's successful rival with their chosen ladies. In the letters he is called *le petit saint.*

The main figure is a cavalry lieutenant, Leopold Desmarets, the lover of Madame de Graffigny. Her letters to him were perhaps too passionate; at any rate, they have disappeared. But the extant letters to her friends reveal the lady's warm heart, and the unlimited gift of observation that later distinguished her *Lettres peruviennes.*

An unbounded admiration for Voltaire drew her to Cirey. To be near him, hear him talk, sit next to him, is paradise for her. In the first weeks of her stay she enjoys this happiness thoroughly.

Her letters often refer to Voltaire as "your idol" (for Devaux, too, adored him); superciliously she calls the Marquis *le bonhomme;* the Marquise is usually *le nymphe.*

27

Upon her arrival on December 4, 1738, at two o'clock in the morning, the Marquise received her

very well; but Madame de Graffigny remained only a minute in the former's bedroom, then went upstairs to her own: "One moment later appeared, who? . . . Your idol with a little candle in his hand, like a monk. He said a thousand courteous things to me; he seemed so glad to see me that he kissed my hands ten times and showed a touching concern over my health. His next question was of you: it took a quarter of an hour. He says he loves you with all his heart. Then he spoke to me about Desmarets and Saint-Lambert, and finally went to give me time to write you. Now it is done. Good night, the mail goes tonight."

The day in Cirey is divided thus: between half-past eleven and half-past twelve everyone is notified that the coffee is served. It is taken in one of Voltaire's rooms. The conversation lasts until twelve or one. Noon in Cirey is called coach-men's lunch hour but M. du Châtelet, Madame de Champbonin, the stout good-natured cousin of Voltaire, and her son, are apparently counted among the coach-men, for they eat at this time. But the Marquise, Voltaire and Madame de Graffigny remain seated, until Voltaire makes a deep bow and asks the others to go. Thereupon everyone retires to his room. At four o'clock there is sometimes a little refreshment for which, however, Madame de Graffigny does not appear if she is not expressly called. At nine o'clock in the evening comes the chief meal—for which Voltaire is always a little late because he cannot tear himself away from his dictation to his secretary—and everyone sits there until midnight: "My God! What a supper! It is always a feast of Damocles. All pleasures are brought together here, but oh! The time is so short; nothing is missing, not even the sword above my head; for time, that flees, is this sword. . . . To be let absolutely alone all day, and then be able to enjoy good company, that is the life for me."

Voltaire lets her have various of his writings to read, when she is alone; *Mérope,* the still unpublished tragedy, and the manuscript of *The Century of Louis XIV,* which Madame du Châtelet does not wish Voltaire to finish—she thinks he should devote himself

to science and leave history alone—and which she therefore keeps locked up. He has to ask her to let Madame de Graffigny have the part of the manuscript that he has already done. He also gives her his commentary on the comedies of Molière, which he had prepared as an introduction for the new de luxe edition of Molière, but which was not used because the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is said to be his most spiteful enemy, ordered Monsieur Lasserre to furnish the introduction for the work.

Voltaire always makes the visits he has to make upon his guests without sitting down; he is always on the point of leaving; is it not one of his favorite sayings, that people are over-addicted to wasting time in idle talk, time, mankind's most precious gift?

The guest is more than a little indignant at the tyranny Madame du Châtelet imposes on Voltaire. In vain do Madame de Champbonin and Madame de Graffigny explain to her the enormity of the crime of locking away *The Century of Louis XIV*: "He is dying of desire to finish it, and says that it is the work that gives him the greatest satisfaction of all. All she can say to justify herself is that there is nothing to be gained by writing a book which would be forbidden publication. I urge him to write for his own satisfaction in the immortality he will win. He answers that he is sure to finish the book, but not here. She is driving him crazy with her geometry." Here Madame de Graffigny is interrupted in writing by Voltaire, who wants to read *Mérope* to her.

She gives a vivid picture of the enjoyment Madame du Châtelet apparently gets from feeling and letting others feel her power over the rare bird she has caught. It showed itself in a love of crossing him, which was essentially a feminine lust of power, that found its satisfaction in trifles.

Voltaire, for instance, comes in to read them *Mérope*. Madame du Châtelet has the caprice to ask him to put on another coat: "It is true, his coat was not neat; but he himself was nicely powdered and wore fine laces. He gave ample reasons for not wanting to change the coat right then; the others are less warm and he easily catches cold. In the end he rang

for his valet to go fetch him another suit. But the valet was not to be found, was out for the moment, and Voltaire now thought he could let the matter go. But no: the nagging began anew. Then Voltaire got excited; furiously he spoke to her in English, and left the room. He was sent for; but he returned the message that he had colic, and thus *Mérope* came to naught."

Madame de Graffigny goes on to tell how the Marquise asked her to go down and bring him back. As long as she and Madame de Champbonin were with him, he was laughing and in a good humor; but as soon as he reëntered the room of the Marquise, his features clouded, and pretending his colic, he took a seat in a corner without speaking a word. The moment the lord of the house left the room, "the two sulkers began to speak to each other in English, and a minute later *Mérope* reappeared." Naïvely Madame de Graffigny adds: "It is the first sign of love I have noticed since I came; indeed, their behavior is admirable; but all the same, she does make life a little hard for him."

Madame de Graffigny prefers Voltaire more and more to the mistress of the house: "Voltaire is always delightful and always thinking of my entertainment. His attentiveness is untiring; he is so fearful that I might be bored. This fear is quite superfluous. Bore oneself with Voltaire!"

Madame du Châtelet's brother, the Abbé of Breteuil, pays her a short visit. He is very courteous, gallant and witty; his presence makes the suppers still more festive. The picture of this company grows quite vivid with the details into which Madame de Graffigny goes in her descriptions. After supper Voltaire begins to get angry because Emily wants to stop him from drinking a glass of Rhine wine he had filled for himself. Then he does not want to read aloud from *Jeanne,* as he had promised. By much jollying Breteuil and Madame de Graffigny finally succeed in breaking down his resistance. Then the Marquise, too, being in just the right mood for teasing, can resist no more; the result is a fusillade of humorous retorts which ends with the reading of a

canto from *Jeanne,* which, however, does not seem any more entertaining than Voltaire's witty conversation.

Another evening Voltaire gave a magic lantern exhibition and accompanied the pictures with a talk which had everyone doubled up with laughter. He described the entire circle of the Duke of Richelieu, then told the story of Abbé Desfontaines, going on from there to one anecdote after another, and ending up with a perfect imitation of the dialect of the Savoyards.

Voltaire told one story about how his valet, by dint of copying his employer's poems, had become persuaded that he was a wit and poet himself. Voltaire gave a few comic examples of this manservant poetry and told how the valet had by and by acquired enough self-confidence to correct things that he found faulty. Thus Voltaire had begun writing the verse

> Ah! croyez-moi, mon fils, voyez mes cheveux blancs,
> La triste expérience est le fruit des vieux

when an interruption called him away before he could add the word "ans." The valet, finding that this did not rhyme, copied the verse in this form:

> Ah! croyez-moi, mon fils, voyez mes cheveux bleus,
> La triste expérience est le fruit des vieux.

In Voltaire's presence some of his guests once asked him to recite a selection from his master's works. He said he could remember only the one passage from *Jeanne,* in which her person is described. This passage had taken the following shape in his memory:

> Trente-deux dents brillent à fleur de tête;
> Deux grands yeux noirs, d'une égale blancheur,
> Font l'ornement d'une bouche vermeille
> Qui va prenant de l'une à l'autre oreille.

Madame de Graffigny was much moved by Voltaire's forbearance and susceptibility in his attitude toward criticism. Emily had ridiculed his tragedy *Mérope,* which she could not abide. Madame de Graf-

figny could feel that he was hurt by her mockery. She herself admired the tragedy with the exception of one scene which did not please her. She told him in private. He thanked her heartily for her objections, and said: "I am glad that you speak to me frankly; you are right, there is something uncommonly trenchant in your criticism." And the good lady adds: "Really, I'm telling you, it's only poor writers who are haughty; the good ones have a sane vanity. He listens to unfavorable criticism, but he likes praise and is not ashamed to admit it."

One night it occurred to Madame du Châtelet to ask Madame de Graffigny if she had had any children. One question led to another and finally the poor lady was brought to the point of telling her life story, which was new to the mistress of the house as well as to Voltaire. "Oh!" she exclaims, "what a good heart!" The pretty lady laughed in order to keep from crying; but Voltaire, "this humane Voltaire burst into tears. He is not ashamed of his sympathy. I wanted to stop; but it was impossible; I was asked again and again to go on. They were so moved that my reserve proved to be of no avail. Finally I had to cry myself."

It was only gradually that she learned the extent of Voltaire's attentiveness toward her. His valet came at frequent intervals to ask if she needed anything. Finally she noticed that Voltaire had ordered all his servants to wait upon her just as upon himself. They were his, not the house's lackeys who served her. She writes with amiable simplicity: "Judge for yourself if it is possible to love your idol sufficiently!"

She describes the way in which Voltaire himself is waited upon at supper. The valet does not budge from behind his chair, and his lackeys hand him everything he needs, just like pages when the King's friends sit at the table; but all this is done without pomp or ceremony. "So true it is that choice spirits know to preserve their proper dignity, without putting on ridiculous affectations."

Madame de Graffigny made every effort to get her friends invited to Cirey; most of all, of course, she wished to present Desmarets, who finally came. But his arrival brought the poor woman a bitter disap-

pointment. For, he had hardly more than arrived when he told her that he no longer loved her.

Just as assiduously as Madame de Graffigny was trying to secure an invitation for Desmarets to come to Cirey, Saint-Lambert was trying to win admission through her. And she, loyal friend, praised him in such glowing terms that Madame du Châtelet finally yielded: "I must tell you that this morning I lay such siege to the lady of the house that she finally committed herself about Saint-Lambert. She is willing to have him come, but he must understand the condition is that he remain in his room and lead the life which is lived here. I have given her such positive assurance of this that she now wishes very much to see him as well as Desmarets here."

It is strange to see how reluctant Emily was at first to receive Saint-Lambert, who nine years later was to become her lover.

Before very long Madame de Graffigny's idyllic existence in Cirey was to come to a rude end. But so far everything was still carefree and gay. Madame du Châtelet took long rides on horseback, Voltaire went hunting. At the theater several merry farces were played, among them one by Voltaire that can be found among his works under the title of *L'Exchange*, a jolly little play in prose.

28

Madame de Graffigny had spent about three or four weeks in Cirey, happily content, when one late evening Voltaire entered her room to tell her that he was lost and that his fate was in her hands.—"Lord, help me, how is that?" she asked.—"How is that?—There are numerous copies of *Jeanne* in circulation. I must leave here at once, I don't know where to go, Holland or perhaps still further. Monsieur du Châtelet is going to Lunéville. You must write at once to Devaux and tell him to get hold of these copies. Is he to be trusted to do that?"—She assured him that she would do everything in her power to prove her devotion to him, and that she was very sorry that this had

to happen during her stay with him.—"No excuses!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You are the very one who sent those copies out." In vain she protests that she has never copied so much as a single line.—"Enough," answers Voltaire, "Devaux assures me that it was you who sent *Jeanne* into the world."

Her head was whirling; she could make nothing of all this, could only reiterate, what was the truth, that these copies of *Jeanne* did not come from her. But he insisted most emphatically that Devaux had read *Jeanne* to Desmarets, that Madame de Graffigny is sending copies to everybody, and that Madame du Châtelet had the proof of this in her pocket.

For the poor woman the entire matter was incomprehensible; she could only see the anger and indignation without being able to explain how this misunderstanding had come about.

Of course, it was not easy to explain. To understand, one must know that the suspicious mistress of Cirey had the bad habit of reading all she could of the letters written by her guests as well as all those addressed to them before they were distributed.

Now the unfortunate and innocent Madame de Graffigny had truthfully reported to her friend the impression she had got from Voltaire's reading of a canto from *Jeanne,* which seemed to her especially amusing and witty; shortly thereafter Madame du Châtelet had opened a letter from Devaux which, referring to this, contained the unfortunate words: *Le chant de Jeanne est charmant.* The distrustful Emily saw this as proof that this passage had secretly been sent to Devaux;—Voltaire did not doubt this, but on the other hand he did not want to reveal the way he had found out about it, and he angrily accused the guest of the house, who could not imagine what it was all about.

Madame de Graffigny did not succeed at once in convincing him. He ordered her to demand back the original and all copies. At his order she began to write; but as she could not demand back what she had not sent, she asked Devaux for some explanation and information about the dangerous copies. When she handed Voltaire the finished letter, he threw it

away, with the words: "Pfui, Madame, one should be honest and straightforward with a poor wretch whose life and well-being are at stake, as mine are."

This embarrassing scene lasted at least an hour; but it was nothing compared to what was in store for the poor misunderstood lady. Madame du Châtelet stormed furiously into her room and hurled at her again all the accusations Voltaire had made before. Then she took a letter out of her pocket, held it toward her now silent guest, and said: "See here the proof of your infamy. I took you here not out of friendship, but out of pity, and you betray us. You stoop so low as to steal a manuscript from my desk to copy it."

Madame de Graffigny could say nothing but, "Be quiet, Madame, I am too unfortunate to be treated so unworthily."

Voltaire took Madame du Châtelet around her waist and drew her to a safe distance from the accused, for she was approaching her guest so excitedly that a physical assault had to be feared.

For a long time the poor woman could find no words; then she asked to see the letter, which was refused. "Then show me at least the sentence that so accuses me." And then she was shown the few unimportant words: "The canto from *Jeanne* is charming."

With infinite relief she told the simple truth: that she had described in a letter the delightful impression she had received by listening.

Voltaire was intelligent enough to believe her, to understand the mistake that had been made. But the furious mistress of the chateau would not back down from her assertions, although Voltaire gave her a long talking-to in English, and asked her in French to say that now she believed her guest.—They left at three o'clock in the morning, leaving Madame de Graffigny on the verge of nervous hysteria.

When daylight came, she was ill and desperate. Nothing would have been more natural than an immediate departure. But the poor creature had not enough money with her to hire a coach to take her to the nearest city. She had to stay where she was, humiliated and abused.

It was small consolation that Voltaire afterward tried to make up for the incident. (Madame du Châtelet could never bring herself to the point of making a hearty apology for her silly attack.) The poor lady spent several wretched months at the the place to which she had come so joyfully and which she now longed so desperately to leave. She could not even give her friends an accurate account of the incident, for she knew that every one of her letters was spied into.

This foolish little incident shows us, among other things, in what crises Voltaire's life was spent, because he could not resist writing things that exposed him to danger, and because he could not refrain from reading these things to a hundred people, would even send copies to a half dozen trusted friends, putting himself at the mercy of their discretion.

29

In running through Madame du Châtelet's letters one can see from her complaints, every time Voltaire leaves her on one of his "unnecessary" journeys, how essential his presence is to her, how unhappy she is without him, doubly unhappy when she is tormented not only by his absence but also by his negligence in sending her assurances of his health and his affection. November 23, 1740, she writes to Richelieu from Paris:

"I have been cruelly rewarded for all I have done at Fontainebleau; I have adjusted the most difficult matters; I have obtained for Monsieur de Voltaire the right to return to his country openly. I won him the good will of the Ministry and paved the way for his acceptance by the Academies. And do you know how he repays such zealous devotion? He informs me curtly that he has gone to Berlin, knowing perfectly well that he is piercing my heart, and leaves me in a state of indescribable torture which your heart alone can understand. . . . I hope to be dead soon. . . . And would you believe that the thought that is uppermost in my mind when I feel that my grief will kill

me, is the terrible sorrow my death would bring to Monsieur de Voltaire. . . . I cannot bear the idea that the memory of me will one day cause him unhappiness."

In another letter, later in the same month, after telling the Duke what unbounded friendship she feels for him, she writes: "But this does not cure me of the unrestrained passion which is the cause of my present unhappiness. It is easy to say: 'That is not possible.' I have an answer that is to the point: 'It is, and will remain so all my life, even though you deplore it.' "

To d'Argental she writes, on October 15, 1743, from Brussels:

"I doubt if anyone has ever been more in love and more desperately unhappy. Just think when Monsieur de Voltaire could and should be back here . . . he goes from Berlin to Bayreuth, where he surely has no business; he spends a fortnight there, without the King of Prussia, and without writing me a single line. He returns to Berlin and stays there another fortnight, and who knows! perhaps he would stay there all his life if it were not that business now recalls him to Paris. Then, he writes me four casual lines from an inn, without letting me know what he was doing in Bayreuth and without mentioning his return . . . and this little note is all I have had from him since September 14, a full month."

Contrast these letters to those in which Voltaire at the same time explains to Frederick quite firmly, though politely, that he could not stay with him because it was impossible for him to abandon his friend.

To further his purpose, Frederick constantly jeers at the poet. He likens Voltaire to Rinaldo in Armida's arms, robbed of his strength by his love, unable to tear his way out of the net his own senses have spun around him.—So, for instance, in his letter of June 20, 1742, in the clumsy lines which smell, so to speak, of tobacco and stale beer:

Enfin ce Bork est revenu
Après avoir beaucoup couru.
Entre les beaux bras d'Emilie
Il m'assure vous avoir vu,

Le corps languissant, abattu,
Mais toujour l'esprit plein de vie.

Voltaire explains in his answer (July, 1742) that it is not love but friendship that binds him:

Vous prenez pour faiblesse une amitié solide,
Vous m'appelez Rénaud, de mollesse abattu,
Grand roi, je ne suis point dans le palais d'Armide,
Mais dans celui de la Vertu.

Frederick says bluntly and tactlessly:

"You are offended because I believe you capable of a passion for the Marquise du Châtelet; I thought I should be earning your gratitude by thinking so well of you. The Marquise is pretty and loveable—you are susceptible. She has a heart—you have feelings; she is not of marble and you have lived together for ten years. Are you trying to tell me that you spoke all this time, to the most delightful woman in all France, of nothing but philosophy? In this case, my dear friend, you must have played a very sad rôle. I did not think that pleasure was outlawed from the Temple of Virtue, in which you insist you live."

Voltaire replies in a rhymed letter to these questions, and sadly but emphatically he refers to his age, which excludes him from the joys of love:

Ah! vous m'avez fait, je vous jure,
Et trop de grâce et trop d'honneur
Quand vous dites que la nature
M'a fait, pour certaine aventure,
D'autres dons que le don du cœur.
Plût au ciel que je l'eusse encore
Ce premier des divins présents,
Ce don que toute femme adore
Et qui passe avec nos beaux ans!
J'approche, hélas! de la nuit sombre
Qui nous engloutit sans retour;
D'un homme je ne suis que l'ombre,
Je n'ai que l'ombre de l'amour.

30

Madame du Châtelet wrote a short essay on *Happiness,* from which one may know her almost as well

as from her letters. To be happy, she says, one must have discarded his prejudices and retained his illusions. One must be high minded; one must enjoy good health, and have keen tastes and enthusiasms. Our only problem in this world is to experience agreeable sensual pleasures and reactions.—It is, as may be seen, the theory of Voltaire's *Le Mondain.* One should give his life a fixed direction and follow it without sorrow and without remorse. One should know his starting-point and his goal, and try to scatter flowers on the path.

Where she speaks of her tastes and enthusiasms, she admits her love of gambling, but dwells especially upon her urge to study: "Of all passions, the desire for knowledge is the one which contributes most to happiness, for it is the one which makes us least dependent upon each other." Love she calls "the greatest of the good things that are within our grasp, the only one to which even the pleasure of study ought to be sacrificed. The ideal would be two individuals who would be so attracted to each other that their passion would never cool or become surfeited. But one cannot hope for such harmony of two persons; it would be too perfect. A heart, which would be capable of such love, a soul which would be so steadfast and so affectionate, is perhaps born once in every century; it seems, as if the creation of two such souls in the same generation is beyond the power of God."

But she believes that an affectionate and sensitive soul can be happy with the mere pleasure of loving. Here she was thinking of herself; for in a letter she says: "I was happy for ten years in the love of the one who had conquered my soul, and those ten years I spent in perfect communion with him, without a moment of anger or languishing. When age and illness had reduced his affection, a long time passed before I noticed it; I loved for two; I spent my whole life with him, and my trusting heart enjoyed the ecstasy of love, and the illusion of believing itself to be loved. It must be said I have lost this happy state. It was not without many tears that I did so."

Voltaire, for his part, said a hundred times that he

became happy only at Cirey. He cared less about the material and sensual happiness than about the quiet joy of living, which he found in the solitude beautified by his friend. "Do not tell me that I work too much. These tasks are trifles for a man who has no other occupation. If the mind has been shaped in the mould of fine literature for a long time, it adapts itself to this work without trouble or effort, just as one has no difficulty in speaking a language which one has studied a long time, or as the hand of a musician runs easily over the keys of a piano. . . . I am trying to lead my life in accordance with my situation without painful passion, without envy, with much knowledge, with a few friends. . . . We must force our minds into all kinds of forms. It is a fire entrusted to us by God; we must nourish it with the best we can find. We must let every conceivable phenomenon enter into our being, open all the gates of our souls to knowledge as well as to emotional experience. Provided it does not try to enter in confusion, there is room in the soul for a whole world."

One can see, Madame du Châtelet's best side was human, while Voltaire, at his best, was pure mind.

There exists a letter from Emily to d'Argental, in which she describes herself from the physical side. "I have," she says, "good health, but I am not robust. There are things that surely would destroy my health, for instance, wine or any kind of liquor. I have denied myself these since my early youth. But I have an ardent disposition, so I spend my mornings steeping myself in baths."

This ardent disposition was matched at first by Voltaire's. But in the course of years, when constant sickness had undermined Voltaire's health, the two became altogether different. Voltaire began very early to feel old. In France of the seventeenth and eighteenth century a man over forty was considered old. The ridiculous old Arnolphe in Molière's *L'Ecole des Femmes,* who is so foolish in trying to win himself a young wife, is forty-two years old. When Voltaire entered the second half of the forties, he began to refer to himself in his letters as an old man.

While he had, mentally, preserved his greatest

vigor while he even felt an increase of his intellectual capacities, he seems to consider that he has arrived at a time of life when friendship has to replace passion.

In sharp contrast to most other artistic geniuses who have kept young physically as long as intellectually, Voltaire scarcely had reached the age of forty, when he regarded love as a passion for which he was too old; his forced resignation and renunciation he expressed in a lovely poem in July, 1741. The poem is entitled *Á Madame du Châtelet:*

Si vous voulez que j'aime encore,
Rendez-moi l'âge des amours;
Au crépuscule de mes jours
Rejoignez, s'il se peut, l'aurore.

Des beaux lieux, où le dieu du vin
Avec l'Amour tient son empire,
Le Temps, qui me prend par la main,
M'avertit que je me retire.

"We must," he says, "leave passion to youth. We have two minutes in which to live. One of these minutes may be devoted to prudence."—He certainly is an old man, although just forty-six years old, when he says:

De son inflexible vigueur
Tirons au moins quelque avantage.
Qui n'a pas l'esprit de son âge,
De son age a tout le malheur.

Laissons à la belle jeunesse
Ses folâtres emportements;
Nous ne vivons que deux moments;
Qu'il en soit un pour la sagesse!

Not, indeed, that the speaker is content with his premature old age, or wants to boast of it, as Cicero in *De senectute* boasts. On the contrary, this condition is death, worse than death:

On meurt deux fois, je le vois bien:
Cesser d'aimer et d'être aimable,
C'est une mort insupportable.
Cesser de vivre, ce n'est rien.

But, while he was grieving over the loss of the sweet indiscretions of youth, he was given, as he says,

one consolation. Down from the heavens came friendship, to take the place of love:

> Du ciel alors daignant descendre,
> L'Amitié vint à mon secours;
> Elle était peut-être aussi tendre,
> Mais moins vive que les Amours.

Madame du Châtelet, at that time thirty-four years old, and having a temperament which "was like fire," could not change into an old woman at the same time. The transition from love to friendship with her was not demanded by Nature, as with Voltaire; and it therefore is not surprising that a number of years later she was carried off by another man.

From now on, however, she is a friend, only, to Voltaire, and during the thirty-seven years he has still to live, no other woman appears within his horizon. The time is past, when he could know the joy and pain of loving, and soon, too, will be gone the time when he could be inspired or enthused by a woman.

From now on, Truth is the sole object of his desire, Humanity the sole object of his adoration. Justice has become his only bride and Fame the only mistress with whom he travels and lives.

A soldier is not fit for marriage. It is unbecoming for a missionary to be married. From now on Voltaire becomes more and more the soldier and the missionary. The Templars were at the same time monks and knights, soldiers and priests. Half soldier, half priest, Voltaire henceforth is a new kind of Templar or rather Grand-master of the Order of Templars, which during his lifetime slowly formed and looked to him as its leader.

END OF VOLUME I

VOLTAIRE

VOLUME TWO

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I

WANDERING LIFE

1

In May, 1739, Voltaire and the Marquise du Châtelet set out from Cirey on a journey which seldom permitted them more than a brief return to their refuge, and which extended over several years. The Châtelet family had come into a considerable fortune, but as it could not be collected without a long and complicated suit which required Voltaire's aptitude for the law, he sacrificed his own convenience to do his friend the favor of going with her from one place to another, until she won the suit and became rich.

A cousin of the owner of Cirey, Marc-Antoine du Châtelet, Marquise de Trichâteau, who died in April, 1740, had left to Voltaire's host and hostess, together with other properties, a little principality situated between Trèves and Jülich. Thus the clever and pretty Emily became a princess. But she set very little store by that title and wished to sell her principality. Voltaire tried to interest the King of Prussia in it, but with no success.

The couple went to Brussels and there divided their time between the innumerable hearings of the law-suit and the studies each had undertaken. The Duke of Aremberg took them for a fortnight to his estate at Enghien; there were wonderful gardens and fireworks and feverish games of chance. Then they went to Paris. At the time of their arrival the city was in a tumult, celebrating the wedding of the eldest daughter of the King, Elisabeth, to the Infante of Spain.

Voltaire had submitted two tragedies to the Comédie Française, *Zulime,* and his latest work, *Mahomet.* With his customary impatience he hoped to see the

first performance of *Mahomet,* although his stay in Paris was for three weeks only. At the time of his departure the actors had not even read the play, and when it was performed after several years, the authorities promptly suppressed it.

Voltaire was not at all in their graces. He published a collection of verse and prose, *Recueil de Pièces fugitives en Prose et en Vers,* which contained the first two chapters of the work *Le Siècle de Louis Quatorze* and a number of poems. It was confiscated. It had never occurred to Voltaire that he could be punished for the publication of work that glorified the seventeenth century and Louis XIV; the Ministry had a different opinion. The publisher was fined 500 francs and besides had to close his shop for three months.

Voltaire writes to d'Argenson that in turning out this historical work he had never imagined he was doing anything more than the work of a good, conservative patriot: in any other age such a task would have been encouraged by the government: "Louis XIV gave to Valincour, Pélisson, Racine, and Despreaux a pension of 6,000 livres to have his history written, but they never did it. And I am persecuted because I carried out what they were supposed to do. I erect a monument to the honor of my country and I am crushed under the stone which I use for it."

This complaint was logical.

Frederick the Great when Crown Prince had asked Voltaire to publish his *Anti-Machiavel.* This the latter eagerly prepared to do and the work was set in type. But Frederick ascended the throne and he changed his mind. Perhaps because he foresaw the difficulties in following as King the theories he had glibly put forward as Crown Prince, and perhaps also (as he maintained to Voltaire) because this book contained passages which might give offense to certain powers. He therefore requested Voltaire to halt the publication. This, however, was more easily said than done. The publisher, expecting a considerable profit from the work would not give it up. Vainly Voltaire offered to pay him his expenses four times over; in vain he tried, while correcting the proofs, to make alterations

and revisions that would render various passages idiotic and hence unpublishable. He did not succeed in inducing the publisher to release his prey, nor in obtaining the King's gratitude for the alterations.

Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet went to Lille to visit his niece, Madame Denis, who was holding reception, as her husband had received a promotion. They found the theatrical manager La Noue in difficulties. Frederick had ordered this man to bring a French company to Berlin. La Noue had done so in the natural hope of earning a profit from the venture. Then suddenly the King cancelled his order: he preferred to wait until after peace was concluded. Of course, La Noue suffered heavy losses as a consequence.

But this man made Voltaire an offer to stage *Mahomet* while the poet was in Lille. The performance scored an immense success in the little Flemish town. Even the priests, whom custom did not allow to attend a theater, arranged to have a private performance. The enthusiasm was even greater when, during an intermission, Voltaire read a dispatch he had just received from Frederick, saying that he had won the battle of Mollwitz. This was Frederick's first victory, to be followed by so many others. When Voltaire read the dispatch aloud the audience cheered wildly.

About this time Voltaire lost at one blow 32,000 livres, by the bankruptcy of tax collector Michel. He who had been called avaricious, did not complain, but was content to write the following epigram:

Michel au nom de l'Eternel
Mit jadis le diable en déroute;
Mais après cette banqueroute
Que le diable emporte Michel!

In Paris Madame du Châtelet purchased for 200,000 francs the palatial Hôtel Lambert, which had been decorated by Le Brun and Le Sueur; Voltaire had a little apartment on the second floor, but he lived there only a few weeks, for, in 1747, Madame du Châtelet sold the palace for 500,000 francs.

After stopping a month in Cirey the couple returned to Brussels, where they found the court-pro-

ceedings far enough advanced to make their presence indispensable for some time.

From Brussels they went to Paris, where *Brutus* was having an enormous success.

2

Voltaire had just begun to get settled in Paris, when the opposition to him received a new and unexpected impetus. Copies of a compromising and confidential letter addressed by him to the King of Prussia were distributed everywhere and put under the doors of influential persons, until it became the talk of the town. (It was the letter of May 15, 1742.) Voltaire, observing the general excitement over his lack of patriotism, declared that the expressions in the letter had been tampered with, and tormented himself and others in trying to find out who had stolen, falsified and distributed the letter. We are sorry to say that there can be no doubt that back of the whole scandal was the great King himself. He would employ any unscrupulous means to acquire Voltaire for his daily companion, and to this end meant to make his life impossible in the highest Parisian circles.

The poet could insist as long as he pleased that the copies were false. False or not, this letter was an ill-chosen prologue to the performance of *Mahomet.* It offered, to one who saw in it a satire against all religion, as many vulnerable spots as *Le Tartuffe* had offered in the seventeenth century.

In all the cafés the play was inveighed against. Piron, who always blamed Voltaire when one of his own plays failed, Desfontaines, who was happy to meet his opponent on a field where the offensive was so simple and his adversary's defense could so easily be penetrated, finally Voltaire's opponents among the clergy, proclaimed that the play was only on the surface an attack upon Islam; but in reality, was an attack on the Christian religion. A doctor of the Sorbonne drew further attention to the fact that the name Mahomet had three syllables, exactly like the name Jesus Christ.

Mahomet was performed for the first time August

19, 1742. The sophisticated first-night audience received it splendidly, but after the third performance the many and loud protests forced the author to withdraw his play. At the same time a pirated edition of his writings was put on the market, the last volume of which contained not only libels on prominent men with whom Voltaire wanted to be on good terms, but also the most abusive attacks upon himself and Madame du Châtelet.

The booksellers divided the stock to dispose of it more rapidly, when they heard that Voltaire had asked Maurepas to have the unauthorized edition condemned. Voltaire learned that Didot and Barrois were the last to have it on hand; he wrote a friendly letter to Didot offering to buy the whole edition. In the meantime the two booksellers were arrested and taken to Fort-L'Evèque. Public opinion took the part of the booksellers against Voltaire. Eighteenth century conception of jurisprudence is strikingly illustrated in the following incident: The Duke of Bethune wrote to the police commissioner of Paris requesting that Barrois should be freed, as he needed him to catalogue and inventory his books for an auction:

"Monsieur, I hear that a Parisian bookseller by the name of Barrois is in prison on your order. If you could dismiss the case against him by Sunday night you would oblige me very much. He took care of the books of my late uncle and made the catalogue. The sale has been announced for Monday, the seventh; it is impossible to do anything in his absence; I hope you will be so good as to grant the favor I ask of you."

The booksellers had no sooner been freed than they began again to sell the fifth volume which, under Voltaire's name, libelled himself and his friend. They were put into prison a second time and sentenced to close their shops. But as they had powerful protectors they were again freed without a fine.

On February 20, 1743, *Mérope* was played for the first time. *Mérope* is a play whose peculiar fascination the modern reader can imagine if he has read Henrik Ibsen's *Lady Inger of Ostrat.* The play was declined by the actors, at first, because it contained

nothing about love. The Abbé Voisenon, to whom Voltaire read it, and who had great influence at the theater, was unrestrained in his enthusiasm. He hurried over to the Comédie Française and made the actors change their minds.

At the first performance the audience was so carried away that it seemed drunk with enthusiasm. The applause was endless, and for the first time in the history of the theater the spectators demanded to see the author of the play on the stage. The Duchess de Boufflers and the Duchess de Luxembourg did everything in their power to induce the poet to obey the wish of the audience. He showed himself, and after kissing the hand of the Duchess de Luxembourg he retired from her loge. This was the description of the *Journal de Paris,* which is dependable. What Voltaire himself wrote thirty years later about this evening, in his *Commentaire historique,* is confused with the first performance of *Œdipe.*

Today curtain calls of the author are such usual occurrences that they are not noticed. But at that time it was a revolutionary thing. Lessing wrote, twenty-four years later:

"*Mérope* called forth the wildest applause, and the parterre gave the poet such an ovation as had never before been recorded. . . . The audience wished to see in person the playwright whose work it so admired; when the performance was over, they demanded to see him, called and shouted until Monsieur de Voltaire must needs come out and let himself be stared at and applauded. I don't know which would have been stranger to me: the childish curiosity of the audience or the vain complacency of the poet. How does one fancy a poet looks? . . . And how weak must be the impression made by a work of art, when one is anxious to compare it with the figure of its creator. The true masterpiece, it seems to me, must fill us so completely that we forget its creator; that we do not regard it as a product of a single individual, but of Nature in general. . . . For, when the Parisian parterre saw how easily a Voltaire could be baited into this trap, how tame and pliable a man could become by its ambiguous caresses, it afforded

itself this pleasure more often, and henceforth a new play was seldom performed, without its author's being asked to perform too, and most of them were fatuous enough to do it. From Voltaire to Marmontel . . . nearly all have stood in this pillory."

The eighty-six-year-old Fontenelle, wishing to make it appear that Voltaire owed this triumph to the acting, commented that "The performance of *Mérope* did great honor to Voltaire; on reading the play, one is forced to conclude that it did still greater honor to Mademoiselle Dumesnil."

3

In the first part of April, 1744, Voltaire and Emily du Châtelet returned to Cirey, and both were happy to be there again. "Cirey is delightful, it is a jewel," wrote Voltaire to d'Argenson. And a few days later he dated a letter to d'Argental: "In Cirey, in Happy-Land." President Hénault, who visited the couple in their country home, was much impressed by their happiness. He wrote in his *Memoirs*: "I found them alone. As a third there was only a monk of the order of the Minorites, a great geometrician and professor of philosophy in Rome. Visualize a delightful refuge, of peace, tranquillity, harmony, charm, talent, and mutual respect, a place in which the seriousness of philosophy is combined with the beauty of poetry, and you will have pictured Cirey." The monk mentioned by the President was Père François Jacquier, who in the previous year had published a book, *Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy.*

But again the stay in Cirey could not be long. Richelieu had given Voltaire a commission which occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else, and which necessitated his presence in Versailles. Louis XV had assigned to Richelieu, his first chamberlain, the arrangements for the festivals which were to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin with the Infanta Marie Therese of Spain. And Richelieu, in turn, had asked Voltaire to write a suitable play for the occasion. The poet, who was anxious to win the favor of the King

and the Court spent—like Molière before him, and Goethe after him—a disproportionate amount of time on this task.

He turned out *The Princess of Navarre* and spent no less than ten months on the revisions and alterations which were demanded, first by the criticisms of d'Argental and Richelieu, then by the whims of the composer Rameau. Rameau was used to behaving despotically toward the little librettists who provided him with texts; now he demanded that Voltaire should reduce to four lines what he had put in eight, and expand to eight lines what he had expressed in four. Hénault writes from Plombières to Count d'Argenson: "What do you say about Rameau who is beginning to correct verses by Voltaire!"

Richelieu tried, diplomatically but firmly, to induce the eccentric composer to relax his demands; and finally he succeeded.

Neither Voltaire nor the Marquise felt like leaving Cirey at a time when they were so comfortable. But Richelieu thought Voltaire's presence essential. So they left Champagne and arrived in Paris in the midst of the city's celebration, with feasts and fireworks, of the King's recovery from the illness in Metz which had almost cost him his life, and the consequences of which had been fatal to the Duchess de Châteauroux.

Near the Hotel de Charost, where the Marquise wanted to stop, more than two thousand vehicles moved in three rows, until none could go forward or backward, because every street was blocked, while the crowd clamored and shouted. The Marquise's first thought was that she must spend the night in her coach without sleep or food. Then she thought of seeking refuge in the residence of President Hénault in the Place Vendôme. The President himself was in Versailles. She and Voltaire went there on foot, sent to the nearest restaurant for supper, and drank the President's health in his own wine.

From the middle of September until the end of the year the couple remained in Paris, where social life and one poem, *Sur les Evénements de 1744,* took up all Voltaire's time.

In the beginning of January he went to Versailles to attend the rehearsals of his play and to direct the decorators, musicians, singers and dancers; for everything in the way of scenic splendor and variety was brought into use for this occasion. His problem in the *Princess of Navarre,* as he wrote in a letter to Cideville, was to "praise the King in the most extravagant key, to laud the Dauphin superlatively, to handle the Royal Family with kid gloves, to satisfy the Court and not to displease Paris." He hoped in the end to win some sort of official recognition as his reward. He had done without such recognition for a long time, and he felt that the lack of it made his position not only insecure but even perilous.

Voltaire had tried to blend speech, song, dance, comedy, tragedy, opera, and ballet into one harmonious whole. This play is by no means to be compared with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest.* But it does rank with the festival plays written by Molière for the Court at Versailles and by Goethe for the Court at Weimar.

Familiar as Voltaire was with Court life, he did not always succeed in avoiding things considered offensive. The code of etiquette was too strict and too elaborate. A certain line was considered to be in scandalously bad form. Originally it read:

Vos suivantes et vos dames du palais.

To mention the female attendants before the ladies-in-waiting!—The line was changed to read:

Vos premiers officiers, vos dames du palais.

When a few days later *Theseus* was played before the Infanta, she remarked: "This is probably not written by the same person who wrote the text to that ballet of the other day, for that seemed to me to contain a great many flat jokes and vulgar expressions."

But Voltaire had fulfilled his obligations as the national poet and as a courtier, and he had not long to wait for his reward. He was promised the position of *"gentilhomme ordinaire de Sa Majesté"* at the first

possible occasion, and was immediately given the title and salary of Royal Historian. The appointment was worded thus:

"Versailles, April 1st, 1745. In considering the awards by which His Majesty contributes to the advancement of literature, the King has today found no one more worthy to receive proof of His favor and to be distinguished by a title of honor, than the Sieur Arouet de Voltaire, who has made in every science he has undertaken the most rapid progress, the fruits of which are his writings, which have found well-deserved approval."

He was appointed Historian with an annual salary of two thousand livres. Satisfied as Voltaire doubtless was with the advantages attained, it seemed to him odd that he should owe them to this puny, little, made-to-order fantasy, and he wrote the oft-quoted epigram:

Mon *Henri, quatre* et ma *Zaïre*
Et mon Americaine *Alzire*
Ne m'ont valu jamais un seul regard du roi.
J'eus beaucoup d'ennemis avec très peu de gloire;
Les honneurs et les biens pleuvent enfin sur moi
Pour une farce de la foire.

He had won because Madame de Pompadour liked him. But he was mistaken if he imagined that he enjoyed the favor of the King.

4

Voltaire had indeed come into closer touch with the King and Court. He was given the task of sketching Louis XV's letter to Elisabeth of Russia, who had offered to act as a mediator of peace. Soon after the French troops won the victory of Fontenoy under the eyes of the King. Voltaire was one of the first to learn of it, as d'Argenson, his old school comrade, sent him a messenger with the news and asked for an ode to commemorate the victory. Voltaire answered enthusiastically: "It is three hundred years since a King of France has done anything so glorious."

The problem was difficult. Everyone who had dis-

tinguished himself or was in any other way concerned in the battle, wished to be mentioned. The victory was won on May 11, 1745. The news reached Paris on May 14. The approval of Voltaire's ode by the censor is dated May 17. One can see with what speed he did his work. When details came in, the ode grew. In each new edition it had to be expanded, and the editions succeeded one another with great speed. In a letter to d'Argenson Voltaire asks him to draw the King's attention to the fact that in ten days five editions had been published to his glory. In one of the later editions the poem was dedicated to Louis, whom it praises immoderately, but perfunctorily, as a hero. The poem is lively and dramatic, but official; executed to order but executed with honest enthusiasm.

Two matters still weighed on Voltaire's mind: that the performances of *Mahomet* had been interrupted, and that he was not a member of the Académie Française. For the present *Mahomet* was his primary interest. He considered what would be his most effective defense against the accusation that the play was an attack, by way of Islam, upon Christianity. He concluded that nothing would have a better effect than to induce the Holy Father to accept the dedication of the tragedy. If the Pope was not offended by the play, the petty churchmen would only be making themselves ridiculous by continuing their indignation.

At first he tried to induce the Minister of Foreign Affairs, d'Argenson, to have the French Ambassador to Rome, the Abbé de Canillac, take up the matter. D'Argenson showed no inclination to ask any such favor of Canillac. But Voltaire had other arrows to his bow. Madame du Châtelet was friendly with Mademoiselle du Thil, who in turn was well acquainted with an Abbé de Tolignan, who had access to the Pope. A copy of *Mahomet* was given to Benedict XIV by him in the name of the poet, with the dedication and the petition to His Holiness to be so gracious as to give to Voltaire a few medallions and his portrait as a reward The Abbé also handed the Pope an extract Voltaire had made from the Papal

writings, as Lambertinus, the Pope, had written no less than fifteen folio volumes, accompanied by a little inscription to go under the Pope's portrait:

> Lambertinus hic est, Romæ decus et pater orbis,
> Qui mundum scriptis docuit, virtutibus ornat.

The Pope gave the Abbé de Tolignan two medallions for Voltaire and gladly accepted the dedication. This read, in the poet's best Italian:

"Holy Father,

"Your Holiness will excuse the liberty taken by one of the most insignificant yet most devoted admirers of spiritual nobility, in dedicating to the Overlord of the True Religion a work written against the founder of a false and barbaric creed.

"To whom could I better dedicate this satire on the cruelty and the errors of a false prophet, than to the representative and successor of a God of Peace and Truth?

"With Your Holiness' permission I lay at Your feet the work and the author. I make bold to ask Your protection for the work, Your blessing for its creator. With this feeling of deep devotion I kiss Your Holy foot.

"Paris, August 17, 1745."

The Pope answered, with ecclesiastical finesse and cleverness, thus:

> "Pope Benedict XIV to his beloved son.
> "Greetings and Apostolic blessing.

"Several weeks ago We were brought your admirable tragedy *Mahomet* which We read with great pleasure. Thereafter the Cardinal Passionei delivered to Us in your name the splendid ode on Fontenoy. Signor Leprotti conveyed to Us your letter of August 17. Each of these proofs of good will deserves a special acknowledgment. But We combine them all and send you the thanks due to so many proofs of unusual friendship for Us, with the assurance of Our respect for merits which are so outstanding as yours.

"When your inscription was published in Rome We

were informed that one of your countrymen, a man of letters who was stopping here, remarked at a social gathering that the first line contained an error, as you had treated the word *hic* as short, whereas it should always be long.

"We replied that he was mistaken, and that the vowel was short or long, according to the poet's preference. Vergil used it as short in the line:

Solus hic inflexit sensus, animumque labantem (Aen. IV 22)

but as long in another line:

Hic finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum (Aen. II 554).

"This seems to Us very well answered by a man who has not read Vergil for more than fifty years. Although you yourself are the party concerned in this matter, Our opinion of your honesty and truthfulness is so favorable that We appoint you judge in the difference between Us and your critic. There only remains to grant you Our Apostolic blessing.

"Dated in Rome in Sante Maria Maggiore, September 19, 1745, in the sixth year of Our Pontificate."

It was Voltaire's hope to persuade Louis XV that he was really an obedient son of the Church.

5

The reader will have noticed how cleverly and carefully Benedict XIV avoided any discussion of the literary contents of the French comedy. He restricted himself to a polite commendation of Voltaire's Latin metrics.

Frederick seemed to be the born protector for Voltaire's *Mahomet.* Hence Voltaire's long letter to Frederick, dated December, 1740, which was not meant to be a private letter. In it he points out the value of considering in history those ancient criminals, the famous originators of superstition and fanaticism, who were the first to persecute those who refused to become their followers. There is no need to think, he says, that such crimes are things of

the past, or that the fire of the religious wars is extinguished. To believe this is to delude oneself with too high an opinion of human nature. He cites many facts in proof of his statements.

What advantage is it to mankind to learn of the passions and misfortunes of a hero of antiquity, if it is not taught by them? The theater should instruct and warn. The stage is the most powerful rival of the pulpit.

In other words, the theater under Voltaire's hands became a counter-church.

6

As soon as Voltaire heard of the victory of Fontenoy, he wrote the following verse and sent it to the lady whom it compliments:

Quand Louis, ce héros charmant
Dont tout Paris fait son idole,
Gagne quelque combat brillant,
On doit en faire compliment
A la divine Etioles;

The unheard-of had come to pass, and though it left the state unshaken it caused the Court to rock on its foundations. A lady who was not, like all previous favorites, descended from the nobility, but from the aristocracy of finance, had taken a place beside the King.

Jeanne Antoinette Poisson was born in Paris on December 29, 1721. She grew up pretty and talented, but with one thing against her: her descent. Monsieur Poisson, her putative father, had supplied provisions to the army, but had performed this business with such dishonesty that he was sentenced to be hanged; he therefore disappeared for some time to Hamburg. Her mother, Louise Madeleine de la Matte, was loved and supported first by a Secretary of State, then by an Ambassador. At the time her daughter was born she was on intimate terms with General Le Narmant de Tournehem, who provided an excellent education for the young girl.

Under Jeliotte she learned to sing and to play the piano; under Guibaudet to dance. She sang like an opera singer and danced with the professional skill of a ballet dancer. Crébillon, as a friend of the family, instructed her in the art of reciting verses and brought out her talent as an actress. Crébillon's friends taught her the sophistication of the age, the art of expressing her feelings roguishly and her thoughts ironically. Her horsemanship was unequaled. No one else could arouse such a storm of applause by a song or by playing the piano. None could compete with her in imitating the most popular actresses in their mannerisms and speech. No one told an anecdote with greater subtlety and wit.

No one knew better than she how to dress herself. Not only did she know how to wear her clothes in such a way as to bring out every superiority of her figure, but she could adorn herself with anything she took into her hands, a band, a scarf, a piece of material, so that at once it became attractive, and she with it. She had the female genius which gives a personality to every style, and every rag that she put onto her body she wore with individuality.

She was skilful in drawing and etching. This marvellous combination of talents made an impression upon women as well as upon men. We therefore see her in touch with two of the five sisters who preceded her as favorites of the King. One evening Madame de Mailly, after Mademoiselle Poisson had played a piece on the piano, embraced her enthusiastically. Some time later, after her marriage, when the Duchess de Chevreuse spoke enthusiastically to Louis XV about "the little d'Etioles," the Duchess de Châteauroux approached her quietly and stepped so hard on her foot that she was made sick. The next day Madame de Châteauroux paid a visit to the Duchess to apologize for her clumsiness, and in the course of the conversation she let drop the words: "Do you know that the talk is of giving the little d'Etioles to the King, and that all that is waited for is a way in which to do it?" At the same time she ordered her prospective rival to keep away from the woods in which the King went hunting.

Madame d'Etioles, although she was young and unknown, made so strong an impression upon experienced connoisseurs, such as President Hénault, that, after having met the young lady at a soiree, he wrote in 1742 to Madame du Deffand: "I met there one of the prettiest women I ever saw. She knows much about music; she sings with animation and with perfect taste; she knows a hundred songs; she plays comedy in Etioles on a stage which is as good as our Opéra and which boasts all mechanical facilities for shifting scenes."

Among her many admirers her mother's lover chose for her his nephew, who was very rich. In March, 1741, she was married to Charles Guillaume le Normant, *seigneur d'Etioles, chevalier d'honneur du présidial de Blois*. Her husband, scarcely twenty-four years old, was an ugly little runt; his passion left her cold; she saw in him only a means for social advancement.

7

She was dazzlingly pretty. Her skin was incomparably white; her face was a perfect oval, the lips somewhat pale, the great eyes of an undefinable color—in one of the two portraits of her in the Louvre, they are blue, in the other, brown; but under their lovely, dark brows these eyes enchanted him who had a weakness for blue eyes, as well as him for whom brown eyes were irresistible. She had wonderful light brown hair, the prettiest teeth, and two dimples in her cheeks. She was of medium height, slender, lithe and dainty; her hands were exquisite, her movements animated and occasionally passionate. But the greatest charm of her face was the continuous change of expression, now gay, now dignified, always charming.

Her mother's lover deeded half of his property to the young couple at once, the other half by will in the event of his death. The young beauty installed herself in luxury at Etioles and invited there the friends of her father's house, among them Fonte-

nelle, Abbé de Bernis, Cardinal Maupertuis and Voltaire, who later recalled many a glass of Tokay wine that had been served him at Étioles.

In the accounts which Madame de Pompadour kept there is an item which reveals what, under the influence of her mother's hopes during her early youth, had become an obsession: "600 livres to Madame Lebon, because she prophesied to me when I was only nineteen that I would one day become the King's mistress." Superstitious as she was she had clung with fervent ambition to this prophecy and had been encouraged when she heard friends call her with cynical flattery *un morceau de roi.*

Since the death of the Duchess de Châteauroux, the King's bed had been a lonesome place. The Queen spent all her time in piety and good deeds. For relaxation she permitted herself only the modest suppers with the Duke and Duchess de Luynes, where the company was always the same. The principal guests were the brother of the Duchess, the Cardinal de Luynes, President Hénault, and the Duke and Duchess de Chevreuse. The Duke de Chevreuse to everybody's delighted amusement was platonically in love with the Queen and jealous of Hénault, with whom Marie Leszczynska liked to talk.

At first these evening parties had been the bright spots in the Queen's monotonous life; by and by they grew boring by repetition. Sometimes the Duchess de Luynes' old dog Tintamarre snored so loudly that he awakened the Cardinal. Then the latter started up with such a comic movement or with such an absent-minded expression that the old and tired company had to smile.

The King had consoled himself with occasional women, but he was at the point where he had had enough of these flirtations and wished a steady mistress. Richelieu was attached to Madame de la Popelinière, whose lover he had become after climbing up through the chimney. He vainly offered the King this lady, the former opera singer Deshayes, whom he loved with the most touching passion. The King had refused to accept this generous self-sacrifice. Madame d'Etioles had long been scheming to attract Louis'

attention. She appeared in Senart Forest, where the royal hunts took place, in the most charming costumes, and in her little coach drove constantly between the horses and dogs so that the King was forced to notice her. The great masquerade ball, which was given in February, 1745, on the occasion of the wedding of the Dauphin, gave Madame d'Etioles her chance to approach the King. The acquaintance was made and on the following day she dined with the King in Versailles.

Madame de Tencin and her brother, the Cardinal, tried to ingratiate themselves with her as they had previously with Madame de Châteauroux. They gave the young lady good advice and all sorts of warnings. The Bishop de Mirepoix, on the other hand, whom Voltaire had subjected to the ridicule of the King of Prussia and of all Europe, and who kept his powerful position at Court as the teacher of the Dauphin, strenuously opposed the new favorite, and emphasized what a bad precedent would be set if a woman who had lived in the worst company and who had had social intercourse with Fontenelle, Maupertuis, and even with Voltaire, should be elevated to the position of *maîtresse en titre*. But the opposition of Mirepoix had as result that those among the King's confidants who were opposed to the dull and pious party, protected the young lady and incited Louis XV to assert himself against ecclesiastical guardianship.

Her relations with the King had scarcely been confirmed when she told him of her fear, more pretended than real, of what her husband might plot in his jealousy. Thus she induced Louis to give her Madame de Mailly's former apartment in Versailles, where no Othello could find and throttle her. Moreover she got the King to promise her his protection against the Dauphin, and to give her the promise of an estate. When, in May, Louis went to the army in Flanders she completed her conquest by securing the King's promise that she should become *maîtresse declarée* upon his return.

8

By the beginning of July she was able to show her friends no less than eighty letters sent her by the King during the preceding two months. Not content to rely on her own letter-writing, she had the skilled young Abbé de Bernis write the most flattering, loving, and intelligent letters which she then copied in her own hand as answers. One of the King's last letters to her was addressed: "A la Marquise de Pompadour" and contained the document which granted her this title. Voltaire, who this summer was making a visit of several months at Etioles, wrote on this occasion the stanzas the first of which reads:

Il sait aimer, il sait combattre,
Il envoie en ce beau séjour
Un brevet digne d'Henri Quatre,
Signé LOUIS, Mars et l'Amour.

One evening after she had played a rôle in Versailles in *Les Petits Appartements* he wrote the following verses:

Ainsi donc vous réunissez
Tous les Arts, tous les goûts, tous les talents de plaire:
Pompadour, vous embellissez
La cour, le Parnasse, et Cythère.
Charme de tous les cœurs, trésor d'un seul mortel,
Qu'un sort si beau soit eternel!
Que vos jours précieux soient marqués par des fêtes!
Que la paix dans nos champs revienne avec Louis!
Soyex tous deux sans ennemis,
Et tous deux gardez vos conquêtes!

The Marquise was surely not without enemies at Court. Every phrase she used that revealed her lack of noble breeding was ridiculed. It cannot be denied that, just when she wanted to display her *savoir faire*, she was occasionally very unlucky. One day she called the Duke of Chaulnes "mon cochon!" No matter how many advantages she might possess she had not noble blood, and that the Court could never excuse. She was a bourgeois not by birth only but also in thought, and she loved the King sentimentally. Naïvely she proposed to the King a marriage be-

tween a son who resembled him very closely and whom he had had by Madame de Vintimille, and her daughter Alexandrine whom she had by her marriage with Monsieur d'Etioles. She wished that the King's blood and her own might mix, and she was moved at the thought of herself as a grandmother. The King rejected with disgust the notion of seeing his Bourbon blood mixed with bourgeois stock, and shortly afterward Alexandrine died.

Madame de Pompadour was also plebeian in the show of modesty which she made in her relations with the King; she took an attitude which was ridiculed by the Court as the behavior of a grisette, and which was glorified as chastity by the poets.

To the bourgeois in her nature belonged her desire not only not to offend the Queen but even to gain her favor, and to use her own power to improve the position of the legitimate wife.

Her presentation to the Queen took place in Versailles on September 14, 1745. She came straight from a presentation to the King, which had taken place in the anteroom. In the rooms of the Queen the suspense was awful. Would the Queen be gracious or would she be cold? The Queen, with whom long diplomatic negotiations had been carried on in advance, behaved very graciously, and asked after the only lady of the higher aristocracy with whom Madame de Pompadour was intimate. "Do tell me, how is Madame de Saissac? I have had the pleasure of seeing her several times in Paris." Moved by so much kindness Madame de Pompadour stammered: "Madame, I have a real passion to please you, if it is possible."

To convince the Queen of her sincerity and to find an excuse for renewed assurance of her devotion, the favorite acted as though she had noted signs of coolness in the Queen's attitude. She confided this to the Duchess de Luynes who quickly brought her word from Maria Leszczynska. "that the Queen had nothing against her, on the contrary acknowledged her anxiety to please her on every occasion."

This induced Madame de Pompadour to write the Duchess a long letter, which was to be read by the

Queen. In it she expresses her devotion with bourgeois sincerity and humility, and also describes her struggle against the general opposition of the Court. The letter begins:

"You restore me to life, Madame la Duchesse; I have spent the last three days in a perfect torment, as you will easily believe, you who know so well my devotion to the Queen. I have been most horribly slandered to the Dauphin and to the Dauphine you were good enough to explain the falsity of these abominations of which I was accused. A few days before that I was told that the Queen, too, had been turned against me. Judge for yourself my despair! The Queen turned against me, who would lay down my life for her, me, to whom her favor becomes more precious every day!"

Madame de Pompadour denied the truth of all the slanders against the Queen that were brought to the King's ears in a continuous stream. She induced him to sit down now and then for a few minutes at the Queen's card table, to invite her to Choisi for lunch, even persuaded him on January 1, 1746, for the first time in years, to give the Queen a New Year's gift, a gold tobacco case in which was set a small watch, a gift which was originally meant for the recently deceased mother of the Marquise.

It is true that the Dauphin, the Dauphine and their bigoted following showed the favorite nothing but icy indifference. When they sat with her in the King's coach none of them spoke a word except in answer to a direct question. Richelieu treated her rudely at first. If the King did not want to have an affair with Madame de Popelinière, there were still his two nieces, Madame de Flavacourt to whom Louis previously had been attracted, and Madame de Lauraguais, whom he had found so entertaining and who with her sarcastic wit made the Marquise of Pompadour her butt. What better object of ridicule could she find than a common woman who wanted to raise herself by a union with a King!

But in a short time a reconciliation took place between the Marquise and Richelieu.

Before long, Versailles was backed in its hatred by

the laughter loving and malicious city of Paris, which greeted all provoking occurrences at Court with a flock of epigrams, lampoons and scurrilous ballads.

It was Maurepas who secretly opened the floodgates and let mockery and sarcasm from his own pen mix with the stream of libelous songs which were given the name poissonades.

9

The best thing for the favorite to do was to form a small but dependable circle of her own in this Court which was so opposed to her. As a nucleus she had Madame de Tencin and her brother, invaluable advisers, the aged Princess of Conti whose extravagances kept her so overwhelmingly in debt that she was willing to make any concessions, the young Prince of Conti to whom she promised that she would further his marriage prospects with the Princess Adelaide, and who offered to ally himself with her out of jealousy of the houses of Condé and Orléans. Then she had on her side a diplomat, Monsieur de Saint-Severin; by flattery she won over two Marshals, Noailles and Belle-Isle; and finally, the Marquis de Pusieux, through whose hands all intercepted letters passed, and with whose assistance she could be assured that the King would find nothing in his mail that attacked her.

When she was still Madame d'Etioles she had known the powerful brothers Pâris. One could not have better support than those men in whose hands were the finances of France, when one was intimately connected with a King who was constantly in financial difficulties.

It was Madame de Pompadour's problem to make it clear to Louis how these men with their wealth of ideas could provide him with the money he needed to carry on a war. She supported their daring and fantastic financial schemes which always aimed at the destruction of Austria or Holland or some other power, and allowed the public debt to grow unheeded, allowed the provinces to be drained, so long

as sufficient money was left for the King and for Versailles.

But her primary aim was to win the King entirely and to make herself indispensable to him. In this she proved herself a genius at the art of love. She learned that the innermost point of the King's nature was a black melancholia, which had to be diverted at every moment, which found its outlet in an obsession for talk about death and funerals.

The King was bored, that was the pith of the matter, he was suffering the unutterable boredom of one whom a surfeit of dissipation has left spent and listless. Here the Marquise interfered, with a tact which never erred, with a deep understanding of what this little man was suffering with a perfect sympathy.

It was impossible for him to be bored in her proximity, for she possessed the genius of being always new. Her beauty renewed, changed, multiplied by her ability of dressing and adorning herself. Her attraction remained ever fresh, because her behavior, her speech, her movements, her caresses were so varied that everything was a surprise, nothing became a habit. When the King in his listlessness and world-weariness was ill-humored, like a seductive good angel, she brought him forgetfulness in one hand, and enjoyment in the other.

What he needed for his inner emptiness was recreation, and she furnished him a thousand little occupations and let him undertake brief journeys. She locked his door when the ministers came to work with him. She hid him in her apartment in Fontainebleau or Choisi or Versailles, when the foreign Ambassadors sought an audience wherewith to bore him, who was bored anyhow. She sang to him; played to him; told him entertaining stories.

Like Scheherazade, Madame de Pompadour prolonged her existence by giving the King a thousand and one nights, and then another thousand.

When the King in his fear of Hell suffered an access of religion the Marquise knew how to make even religion enjoyable. She made religious musical feasts for him, gave church concerts in her apart-

ments, and chorals in which she was the soloist, accompanied by the loveliest voices which could be found among the ladies and gentlemen of the Court.

When the King felt ill-humored either because of remorse or because of the lurking ennui, she made him a spectator of theatrical performances which she arranged and in which she herself played the leading rôles.

The King was easily persuaded to have one of the wide galleries of the castle converted into a theater; for Richelieu, now reconciled with the Marquise whom he had seen play comedy at Chantemerle, and the Dukes of Nivernois and of Duras, who had played with her there, constantly spoke to the King of the dramatic talents of his mistress, which she had not so far had any occasion to display to him.

The theater was named *Le Théâtre des Petits Appartements,* and three steps from the sanctimonious Court of the Dauphin, Madame de Pompadour boldly staged *Tartuffe,* and had the satisfaction of knowing that the Dauphin's courtiers were chagrinned at not being allowed to take part in or to attend the play. After one of these performances in which Madame de Pompadour scored an unusual success, King Louis said to her aloud: "You are the most charming woman in France."

The effort to fascinate the King by constant variety accounts for the number of estates Madame de Pompadour acquired.

There was, for instance, Crécy. It contained a gorgeous apartment for the King, with a banquet hall forty-nine feet long, as well as a small apartment for herself and a park with terraces which permitted a view of the valley of the Blaise River as far as the green mountains. There was the little Château la Celle which she had bought from the King's chamberlain, Bachélier. Here were three large terraces between groves formed like arcades. The canal, with the royal barge, was surrounded by a fence festooned with red and yellow hollyhocks, which reflected in the water. At one evening banquet everything was illuminated by little lights: the canal, gondolas, the two groves. At the last course the hostess, dressed

as Night, cried out "Come, come, follow me, all of you!" Whereupon everybody went to one of the groves where a children's ballet was performed and a chorus was sung. A courtier recited a poem of praise to the King. All were in dominoes and masks and scattered in the clear night through the park—a lively picture by Fragonard.

The Marquise had tiny castles built in the woods. These were called "Hermitages." There were three, l'Hermitage in Compiègne, the one in Versailles, and the one in Fontainebleau. Madame de Pompadour, not content with her residence of the Hôtel Pontchartrain in Paris, moved to the palace of the Count d'Evreux in the Faubourg St. Honoré and had it decorated with rare furniture and Gobelin tapestries.

The most magnificent example of the fertile imagination and exquisite taste of the Marquise was the Château Bellevue, which she had erected on the banks of the Seine at a spot which moved her by its natural beauty. She sat on a seat of stone and grass and sketched for the two architects she had asked to come, the buildings as she visualized them, the gardens as she wished them. Ground was broken June, 1748; in November, 1750, the castle was opened.

The thirty-six millions of francs which Madame de Pompadour spent in twenty years went to an army of sculptors, painters, marble-workers, gilders, bronze-moulders, porcelain-workers and gardeners. In the anteroom of Bellevue stood two statues, one by Falconnet, the other by Adam. The dining-room was painted by Oudry, the wood-carvings were done by Verbreck. Vanloo painted one set of walls and Saly chiseled the statue of Amor which adorned the gallery of the music hall.

Alarmed at the apparently unlimited power of Madame de Pompadour, Maurepas could no longer restrain himself. With his capacity for making the business of government entertaining for the King, with his dependable memory, his great knowledge of people and of conditions in the state, he considered himself indispensable and thought he could dare anything.

The Marquise asked him whether he thought he

could track down the author of the songs against her. He answered: "As soon as I find him, I shall report him to the King." And when she said: "You don't pay any especial attention to the King's mistresses, do you?" he answered with calm effrontery: "I have always respected them, whether they deserved it or not."

On a journey to Celle the favorite succeeded, by using all kinds of tricks—by stating that Maurepas was conspiring with the Dauphin against the King, by describing her fear of being poisoned by him "like the Duchess of Châteauroux"—in effecting the dismissal and disgrace of the Minister. Two hours after this had been decided. Maurepas was awakened from sleep by this message:

"I promised I would let you know in advance; I am keeping my word. I am no longer pleased with your services. You will submit your resignation to Monsieur de Saint-Florentin. You will go to Bourges. Pontchartrain is too near. I give you the rest of the week to prepare for the journey. You are not to try to see your family. You are not to send me any reply.

Louis."

Madame de Pompadour was made a duchess.

10

The Duchess had the ambition to attach men of letters and science to herself and to the Court in order to make the age of Louis XV at least as famous as that of Louis XIV.

Voltaire was her favorite author. Her influence had obtained for him the commission to write his *Princesse de Navarre,* and he owed to her his appointment as *historiographe de France,* and the title of *gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre,* which pleased him so much that he retained it when several years later he ipso facto renounced the office by his journey to Prussia.

Voltaire writes of her in the *Précis du siècle de Louis Quinze:* "Europe dates its good fortune from the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. One will be surprised

to learn that this peace was the fruit of emphatic advice given by a young lady of high standing, famous for her beauty and charm, rare talents, intellect, and of an envied position."

He dedicated his *Tancrède* to her, with gratitude for her intellectual interests, but with some unfortunate lines. He wrote: "Since your childhood I have seen your charm and your many talents develop; I have at all times received proofs of your kindness. If any censor were to disapprove of the homage which I pay you, it could be only one who was born with an ungrateful heart; I owe you much, Madame, and I must say so. I dare still more; I dare to thank you publicly for the kindness you have shown to a great number of real writers, great artists, men with merits in more than one line."

Madame de Pompadour's lady-in-waiting, Madame de Hausset, says in her memoirs that a letter of the Marquise takes exception to the sentence: "If any censor were to disapprove of the homage which I pay you," etc., and that it seemed to Madame de Pompadour that Voltaire meant that he was dedicating the tragedy to a lady whom the public considered unchaste. She therefore took it very amiss.

On this occasion as on several others, Voltaire, who was never impolite to anyone else, treated Madame de Pompadour tactlessly.

The Marquise conferred many favors upon Buffon, although he was one of the Queen's followers, and remained so until his death. But she was not pleased when he wrote: "The physical is the only thing that matters in love." She referred to this when, one day at Marly Park, she tapped him with her fan and said: "You surely are a nice person!"

Even such a Puritan as Montesquieu had no scruples about coming to her for help, indeed in a matter which was not exactly to his credit. When he learned that General Dupin was working on a refutation of his work *L'Esprit des Louis,* he prevailed upon Madame de Pompadour to use her influence to have this criticism suppressed.

Marmontel was her especial favorite and protégé. She worked with him on two of his tragedies; and

when both of them proved failures, she was as warm to him as before. He served a sentence in the Bastille because of a satire against the Duke d'Aumont, but nevertheless, she smoothed his way into the French Academy by influencing Louis XV.

She took an interest in the dour and reserved Jean Jacques Rousseau, as well as in the writers who tried to curry favor with her. She ordered his *Le Devin de Village* to be performed in Fontainebleau; later she herself played in this in man's attire. She would have presented Rousseau to the King and procured him an annual income, had his shyness not prevented.

The King of Prussia had issued a grant "to the sublime genius" D'Alembert, entitling him to a pension of 1200 livres—a stingy enough allowance to be given with such a grandiloquent air. When King Louis decided to supplement it, Madame de Pompadour advised the King to forbid D'Alembert to continue to accept the contribution of the Prussian King, and to give him double the sum from his own purse. Louis, however, did not dare to do so for fear God might not like it because of D'Alembert's contribution to the *Encyclopedia!*

In Voltaire's *Mélanges,* under the title *de L'Encyclopédie,* there is an anecdote describing Madame de Pompadour's efforts to obtain the release of the great work of D'Alembert and Diderot.

One evening at the table of Louis XV at the Trianon, the conversation turned from hunting to the question of the composition of gunpowder. One of those present thought that it consisted of equal parts of salpetre, sulphur and coal. The Duke de La Vallière stated the correct formula. The Duke de Nivernois enlarged upon how wrong it was that those present knew so little about the composition of a material with which they killed and were killed. Then Madame de Pompadour said: "There is absolutely nothing of which we have a correct conception; I don't even know how the rouge I apply to my cheeks is made, or the silk hose I wear on my legs." "That," said the Duke de La Vallière, "is because Your Majesty had our *Encyclopedia* confiscated, after we had subscribed hundreds of francs for it." The

King replied that he had been warned of the dangerous contents of the volumes which were on the dressing-tables of all the ladies.

Nevertheless, servants were ordered to fetch the ponderous tomes that comprised the *Encyclopedia.* The company found in it a complete exposition of the manufacture of powder, and of ancient and modern cosmetics, and the Marquise exclaimed: "So, Sire! You have confiscated this prodigious source of useful information in order to possess it alone and to be the only scholar in Your Kingdom?" The Duke de Cocigny said: "Sire, You are lucky enough to possess in your kingdom, people who have all kinds of knowledge to pass on to posterity. We find everything in here, from the way a needle is made to the method of casting a cannon, from the most insignificant to the most colossal problems. And yet, now, the *Encyclopedia* is available only to foreigners. Take everything I have, Sire, if You wish to, but give me back my *Encyclopedia.*

The King answered that many mistakes could be found in the work, excellent as it was; the Count replied adroitly with the comment that two ragouts of the King's supper had come out rather poorly; but this did not spoil the other courses, which had been excellent.

Posterity has Madame de Pompadour to thank for two great institutions. One is the porcelain works in Sèvres, which creates in fragile material a form of French elegance which has survived not only Louis XV, but all his royal line. The Marquise proved to the King that France paid to China and to Saxony, a half million livres yearly for porcelain which could be manufactured in France. She persevered until the factory was an accomplished fact. The other institution of which she was the founder is the military school for the sons of officers who died in active service.

11

To commemorate the victory of Fontenoy a great fête was planned, and Richelieu, knowing that the

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Princesse de Navarre had been a success and that no other poet was better liked by Madame de Pompadour than Voltaire, ordered another festival play from him. Joyfully he accepted the undertaking, and composed an allegory, *Le Temple de la Gloire,* the curtain rising to disclose Envy in its cave about to attack Trajan, the invincible but mild conqueror, returning from war to the accompaniment of songs of praise. This flattery was in keeping with the taste of the times. Voltaire was given a seat at the King's table for supper; but Louis, though he had spoken a few words to the composer Rameau, said nothing to Voltaire—it seems that this was due not to any dissatisfaction, but to awkwardness and apathy. However, the rumor started that the poet had fallen into disgrace. The story was that the King was sitting with Richelieu in his loge when Voltaire turned to the latter with the question: "Is Trajan satisfied?" He said it so loudly that the King could not help but hear it. The King found this remark impertinent and did not answer.

Voltaire took his position as royal historian seriously and projected a history of the King's last war. To carry out his plan he not only gathered information from the most important French participants in the war, but endeavored also to get the opponents' version. When he learned that the defeated Duke of Cumberland had a secretary by the name of Falkener, he wrote to the latter hoping he might be a relative of his English friend of the same name. It turned out to be his friend himself. Voltaire had proposed to the Marquis d'Argenson, his school comrade and present protector, to undertake a journey to see Falkener when d'Argenson gave him a political commission.

It was a question of writing a protest against the breaking of a treaty by the Dutch. They had pledged themselves at the capitulation of Tournay that the garrison should not bear arms or enter foreign military service for the next eighteen months. Now, nevertheless, the Dutch intended to send troops to Scotland to help the English oppose the Pretender to the throne, Charles-Edward. As England was at war

with France, this was not only a violation of the treaty, but it was direct support of the British Empire which could thus release six thousand men for use against France.

Voltaire received the assignment at ten o'clock in the evening. The next morning he sent the Minister the admirable document which bears the title *Représentations aux Etats-Generaux de Hollande,* whose sound logic and polite tone impressed the States-General, who had ignored the remonstrances of the French Ambassador.

A seat in the Academy became vacant, and Voltaire, who had not recovered from his former disappointments, set his friends to work. This time Louis XV, under the influence of Madame de Pompadour and Richelieu, without again retracting his word, expressed himself in favor of Voltaire's election, and it went through so smoothly that not even the Bishop de Mirepoix objected. But at the same time the news that Voltaire had applied for the vacant seat mobilized all those in the French literary world who hated and envied him. One libel after another appeared, and the slanderous ballads, parodies and lampoons of earlier years were reprinted and circulated. Offended by this flood of abuse Voltaire sought satisfaction in Court and brought suits that wasted a great deal of his time but accomplished very little else.

12

Voltaire as a courtier, shows himself at his best when he compares Louis XV with Trajan and succeeds, with Madame's recommendation, in being admitted to the French Academy. It would have been a reflection on the Academy had Voltaire not become a member. Over the entrance to its hall it had to install a bust of Molière with the inscription: "His glory lacked nothing; ours lacked him." It would have made itself a laughingstock had it had to face Molière's bust with another, of Voltaire, bearing the same inscription.

It was hardly seemly for a writer of Voltaire's

standing to show himself so ambitious to win membership in an institution which could not increase his prestige appreciably. But he thought less of his prestige than of his safety. The Academy seemed to offer its members an immunity that the free-lance could never enjoy.

In his inaugural speech he deviated so far from the traditional form as not to confine himself to complimentary remarks on Cardinal Richelieu and on his predecessor in the Academy. He developed his ideas about the French language, and dwelt particularly on two points. First he drew attention to the fact that the French, in contrast to other nations, translated poetic works into prose; he was strong in his belief that verse should be translated into verse; second, he drew attention to the euphemistic tendency of French poetry. Vergil in his *Georgica* called all farm implements by their names, and Dante did not hesitate in his *Divine Comedy* to give the correct name to anything; it was not the same in French poetry, where it had become impossible to call things by their everyday names. The theatrical style had eliminated every other; the language of the sophisticated had eliminated the language of the heart and the simple vocabulary of villagers, the names for animals, plants and things. The language, even so, had become predominant in Europe. It was spoken by the King of Prussia and by the Empress of Russia, but it was abstract and thus had become narrow and impoverished.

Voltaire in this address, while discussing France's military advantages, emphasized warmly the merits of Maurice of Saxony and of Marshal Richelieu; he concluded with the obligatory glorification of the King, and apparently he felt no shame in expressing the hope of seeing the statue of the King erected in Paris with the inscription: "To the father of the Fatherland."

Nevertheless he did not attain an unassailable position at Court by this attitude. His verses to Madame de Pompadour, which, though unpublished were widely known, especially the lines ending "Et tous deux gardez vos conquêtes," which pictured the King

as having been conquered by the Marquise, had caused ill-feeling in the Queen's circle and in Maria Leszczynska. The time was past when she addressed him as "Mon pauvre Voltaire." The Queen's Court incited the King's daughters against Voltaire. They protested to the King against the boldness and disrespect in a poem which compared his conquest of Flanders with the conquest of his own person.

13

When Voltaire after waiting two years was appointed to fill the vacant position of one of the *gentilhommes ordinaires* of His Majesty (December 22, 1746) and the news reached Poitou, the home of the Arouet family, the haughty and ignorant country gentlemen broke into indignant protest.

We can read a letter on the subject by a country gentleman Ferrand de Méré. It is a most valuable document, for not one sentence in it is written correctly, although it is filled with the conviction of its author's unquestionable superiority. The beginning reads:

> On m'averti, mon respequetable oncle, que le roy, insité en aireurs par des malintenciones, grattifie du titre de gentilhomme de sa charmbre un cuidam nomé Arouet, de Saint-Lou, fils d'une Domar, qui s'est fet connoître du nom de Voltere. Le roy ne fera pas l'affront à la noblesse de dispancé ce cuidam de ses preuve, qui pour ce les procuré se vairat obligé de les cherché dans les parans de sa mère, pars qui l'est de la rautur du cauté paternel (parce qu'il est de la roture de côté); ce qui seroit un dezoneur pour des gentilshommes de nom et d'arme, nobles de pèrenfils de temps immémorable.

As today one has no correct appreciation of the prejudices of the nobility of two hundred years ago, so one does not know how difficult it was to travel. In uncomfortable coaches one rode on impossible roads, with frequent interruptions on the way, when a wheel came off, and stops at inns where the only thought of the hosts was to bleed the traveler of as much money as possible for a poor meal and an

uncomfortable bed. Even those who traveled like Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, not usually stopping at the inns, had to submit to be cheated. A hostess would demand a louis d'or for a cup of bouillon. If a wheel came off and the coach overturned, the farmers who helped to right it had to be grossly overtipped, and even then, if the amount did not suit them and the coach broke down a little further on, neither love nor money would induce them to give assistance.

Another inconvenience was the inopportune time at which one arrived at one's destination. We have seen that Madame de Graffigny arrived in Cirey at two o'clock in the morning. Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet arrived at midnight at the Château Anet to visit the old Duchess of Maine. They came just after supper but with large appetites, and it caused no little trouble to prepare their rooms as late as that. Especially as Madame du Châtelet seemed filled with affectations. First she complained of smoke, then of noise: she needed complete silence in which to do her work.

The couple made up for the trouble they caused by their gift of entertaining. Both could play comedy well, and Madame du Châtelet sang excellently. Among other plays, Voltaire's farce, *Boursouffle,* was performed.

The couple went from Anet to Paris and followed the Royal family to Fontainebleau, where an unpleasant incident and a careless word interrupted the smooth course of Voltaire's life.

Like most of the great ladies of that time, the Marquise had an ardent passion for gambling. In a poem written in her honor, Voltaire indicated this:

> Tout lui plait, tout convient à son vaste génie;
> Les livres, les bijoux, les compas, les pompons,
> Les vers, les diamans, le biribi, l'optique,
> L'algèbre, les soupers, le latin, les joupons,
> L'opéra, les procès, le bal et la physique.

One evening, while gambling in Fontainebleau at the Queen's table, she lost 400 louis d'ors, all the money she had with her and all she had been able to get from her solicitor before she went out. Vol-

taire gave her what he had on him, 200 louis d'ors—which promptly went the same way. A servant who was sent to the nearest usurer obtained another 200 louis d'ors at exorbitant interest; Madame du Châtelet's former lady-companion scraped up 180 louis d'ors. She could try her luck again. But good luck did not come.

In spite of Voltaire's warnings Emily kept on playing until dawn. She lost 80,000 livres. Voltaire who had been only a spectator could not refrain from telling his friend, but in English, that in her absorption in the game she had overlooked the fact that she was playing with scoundrels. The word was hardly too strong. There are ample proofs that noble gentlemen and ladies of that day were not above appropriating, during the play, gold pieces which were lying around. But to say such a thing aloud at the Queen's table where the highest nobility of both sexes was assembled, and to do so in the naïve belief that none of these gentlemen or ladies would understand the word "scoundrel"—that was a carelessness that could have been committed only by a man of Voltaire's temper.

The only possible escape was immediate flight. Voltaire and the Marquise had the coach made ready the same night and disappeared. In their haste they even forgot to take any money with them. This caused many unpleasantnesses on the way.

In the meantime the Duchess of Maine had taken up her residence in her Château de Scéaux, and Voltaire took refuge there. He was led over a back-stairway to an apartment separated from the rest of the château, and here he spent several months behind closed shutters, without going out or showing himself. Even in the daytime he had to work by artificial light, and in the deepest solitude. At two o'clock at night he was taken to the bedroom of the Princess where a supper was served beside her bed, and where he read the old lady what he had written during the day. This was not little; he turned out a number of excellent works in a form which he had not previously tried, the short philosophic novels *Babouc, Memmon, Scarmentado, Micromégas,* and *Zadig.* The Duchess, famous for her wit, told him many anec-

dotes which he used in his *Century of Louis XIV.* There were many things that no one was so well qualified to describe as she, who was a grandchild of the great Condé and widow of a son of Louis and Madame de Montespan.

Finally Madame du Châtelet arrived and freed the imprisoned poet. When the anger died down she had secured from everyone a promise that the words that Voltaire had let slip should be forgotten. In this she succeeded the more easily, thanks to her having employed every means to pay her gambling debts. The winner who probably had not an absolutely clear conscience, gladly consented to a reduction for cash.

Now the couple set out for Cirey. The Marquise was fond of traveling at night, so it was nine in the evening when Voltaire and she took their seats in the coach which was loaded to capacity with luggage. The earth was covered with snow and it was bitter cold. The road was uneven, and full of deep holes. Just outside of Nangins the axle broke and the heavy coach turned on its side. Voltaire lay on the bottom, with Madame du Châtelet and her maid on top of him; above them the entire weight of suitcases, trunks and bundles.

As the two postilions and two lackeys could not lift the coach, messengers were sent to the next village. The snow lay deep, but Voltaire and his friend sat on the cushions which they put on the edge of the ditch, and quickly forgot their accident looking at the clear, bright sky, and discussing astronomical questions. All they wanted was a telescope, and they had forgotten all about their situation when the messengers returned with help.

II

LUNEVILLE AND PARIS

1

After the couple had stayed a month in Cirey, spending their time as usual in study and theatricals, they accepted the invitation of King Stanislaw to Luneville, the capital of his dukedom of Lorraine, where he liked to see amusing guests. He gave Voltaire and the Marquise a splendid welcome. At first he was looked down upon by the people of his little domain, who clung to the old Royal family, and who knew that Stanislaw's reign was only a step in preparation for annexation by France. As a matter of fact, the Chancellor Monsieur de la Galaizière was Lorraine's real ruler. The King's activities were limited to providing the country with fine buildings and striving for popularity by public benefactions. The little Court was idyllic and attractive. It was a certain satisfaction to Voltaire, of whom it was said that the Queen's anger had driven him from Versailles, to show the French Court how much he was liked by the Queen's father.

The fact that Stanislaw was a strict churchman had by no means kept him from supporting a pretty mistress, the Marquise de Boufflers. And the fact that the Marquise made him happy did not keep the King from sharing this happiness, like his power, with his Chancellor. This relationship was known to the King. The Marquise was tender, good-hearted, and phlegmatic. She loved pleasure and gladly accepted the nickname of *Dame de Volupté.*

She was amiable, and got along pretty well with her old King; but now and then his gallantries made her lose patience. One day when the King visited her while she was dressing and began to praise the white-

ness of her neck, the beauty of her arms, the color of her hair, she interrupted him: "My prince, will you not spare me the smallest compliment: Is that all?"—"No," retorted the King, "it is not all. But my Chancellor will tell you the rest." But he was not the only one who "told the rest." Monsieur de Saint-Lambert did his share.

One evening at the supper table of Louis XV in Choisi the conversation turned to the question as to whether it were possible to love several women at the same time with equal tenderness. The King, holding a glass of Vin d'Aï in his hand said: "Doesn't one have an equal fondness for Burgundy, for Bordeaux and for this wine with the bright color which I now drink to your health, gentlemen?"

The Marquise de Boufflers would not have hesitated to agree with the King.

2

In his benefactions King Stanislaw had the desire to further the arts and sciences. As far as his means permitted he gave small pensions to such men of letters as asked for them; to others he granted his protection, which, in view of his position as the father of the Queen of France, could be very valuable.

3

The royal host gave Voltaire his warm attention. Madame du Châtelet at once became the friend of the Marquise de Boufflers, who left nothing undone to make her stay comfortable. She was soon so happy in Luneville that Voltaire, as he wrote to d'Argental, thought she would never want to leave the place. Emily took part in the dramatics at Luneville, both opera and drama.

We have seen how long it was since she felt fully satisfied in her relations with Voltaire. In temperament they had gradually grown as far apart as they were close together in their intellectual interests.

Now, about ten years after Voltaire's love had changed to friendship, when she met the young and handsome, but vain Saint-Lambert, love flamed up and took full possession of her.

In May, 1748, Emily, forty-one years old, and Saint-Lambert, who was ten years younger, began to meet in secret, to their mutual delight.

Madame du Châtelet felt as if a new epoch in her life had commenced. Her first lines to Saint-Lambert read: "I can feel no remorse for anything, because you love me; but unfortunately, what has happened I owe to myself. Had I not spoken to you at the house of Monsieur de la Galaizière, you would not have loved me. I do not know whether to be content with a love which depended upon such a trifle; I do not know but that I would have done better to have left you to the egoistic pleasure you would find in not loving. But it is for you to decide these questions."

Saint-Lambert seems to have combined with his pride at his conquest a certain fear of the restraint to which such an exacting love would subject him. He saw that his freedom could easily be curtailed. He had planned a journey to Italy, which he had to give up, and a journey to England, of which now nothing could come. From a letter of the Marquise it can be seen that he had spoken to her of his sacrifice of the Italian sun for her sake.

She writes: "This proof of love, this renunciation of a trip to the other side of the Alps, of which you so pointedly remind me—had you not done this for me when I asked you for it, I would not believe that you love me. I attach more importance to this promise than you do; I am very much afraid that even if we say the same things, we do not understand each other. But when I think of the attitude you took toward me in Nancy, and of all you gave up for me, and the love you showed me, then I feel I am unjust to say anything to you except that I love you; this feeling crowds out every other."

One moment Emily asks Saint-Lambert to come to her, the next she hurries to him. Here are two letters which complement each other. The first reads: "The weather is delightful; but I have no enjoyment with-

out you; I am waiting for you to stroll with me and feed my swans with bread. Come to me as soon as you are dressed. You can go riding afterward if you want to." The other reads: "I will hurry to you as soon as I am through supper. Madame de Boufflers then goes to bed. She is delightful and I feel a little guilty because I have not told her. But I adore you and it seems to me that when one loves, one can commit no wrong."

There is nothing unusual in this. A woman of forty years loves in essentially the same way as one of twenty. A highly talented woman loves in the same way as one who is not gifted. A woman who has developed in daily intercourse with Voltaire forgets him in her passion for a new adorer, as completely as if she had crossed his name from her mind. That Saint-Lambert is so much younger is an advantage; that he is so much less attentive is comparatively unimportant. He is the new, the victorious, the only one; to love him is good: to be loved by him would be sweet. That his character is not of granite, that as a writer he is not of a calibre to win immortality, though regrettable, does not weaken the passion. His presumed or obvious faults make no impression. Emily sees them as she once saw Voltaire's weakness for glory and still earlier Richelieu's weakness for women. They are unpleasant facts, but they will have to be endured.

For her as for other women, there is in the garden of Paradise a fruit which is exactly to the taste and when she has found it she will not give it up. Now Saint-Lambert was this fruit.

There is a revealing letter dated: Bar-le-Duc, Thursday morning (May, 1748):

"All my distrust of your character, all the resolutions which I had made were unable to protect me from the love you have aroused in me. I no longer try to resist it; I feel the futility of doing so. The time I spent with you in Nancy has increased it to such a degree that I myself am astonished. But far from reproaching myself, I feel an eternal joy in loving you, and that is the only thing which can ameliorate the pain of your absence. I am fully satisfied

with you when we are together, but I am not satisfied with the effect which my departure had upon you. You know well what inclination is but you do not yet know love. I am certain that you will be livelier and brighter today in Luneville than when I was there, and this thought makes me sad. If you can love me only a little; if your heart is unable to give itself unconditionally, to love me immoderately and without calculation, what then will you do with my heart? . . . Doubtless you will write me; but you will make yourself write me. You wish that I would not demand so much of you. I shall get four lines from you; and it will have cost you an effort to write those four lines. . . .

"I expect you in Cirey; do not doubt! If you wish it, you will understand that it can easily be arranged; but you don't wish ardently for anything! Without the proof of love, which you reproach me so sharply for requiring of you, giving up the Italian journey, I would not have believed that you loved me."

4

When Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet met the King of Poland in Commerci, comfortable quarters had been reserved for them. The Marquise had a suite on the ground floor, the windows of which overlooked the court of the castle; Voltaire had a smaller apartment on the second floor with a view over the gardens; both were in the left wing of the castle. The Marquise de Boufflers lived in the same garden in the building in which the baths were located near the *orangerie*. She did the honors of the table at which the guests took their meals. The King never ate supper; he went to bed early.

Monsieur de Saint-Lambert had not been invited on the excursion from Commerci to Luneville; the King did not like his making love to the Marquise de Boufflers. As Saint-Lambert had not been invited, he came incognito and got lodgings in the parsonage which adjoined the *orangerie*. A door led from the

parsonage into the vaults so that the priest could walk in the garden as often as he wished.

In the other end of the same vault was a door leading into the bath-house where Madame de Boufflers lived. Through this door the King came every afternoon to play a game of cards with the Marquise, to hear some music, or to smoke his pipe. Then when he retired between nine and ten o'clock Monsieur de Saint-Lambert came in the same way. A lighted window told him when the King was in the house, and when the light was extinguished he knew that the King had retired. He had his own keys and with a dark lantern he found his way to the apartment of the Marquise. Here every evening she gave little suppers to those of her friends who had the secret of Monsieur de Saint-Lambert's presence in Commerci. All the guests were served by her own lackeys, who brought the meals from the King's kitchen.

Monsieur de Saint-Lambert had become somewhat bored with all the precautions he had to observe in order to see Madame de Boufflers, when the arrival of the Marquise du Châtelet turned his interests in another direction. Now he began to spend his evenings with Madame du Châtelet until the moment when he was permitted to appear for supper with the Marquise de Boufflers.

One evening when Voltaire had come down from his rooms before being told that the supper was served in the bath-house, not finding a lackey, he entered Madame du Châtelet's apartment unannounced. Thus he came to the last room, which was only half lit, and there he discovered Emily and Monsieur de Saint-Lambert on the sofa in so intimate an entertainment that they apparently had not thought of the appearance of a third person.

Surprised and angry, Voltaire reproached them most violently. Saint-Lambert answered that he was greatly astonished that anyone dared to call him to account for his behavior, and that whoever did not like it had only to go outside in the front of the castle, He would follow at once, and he would be willing to give any explanation.

In a rage, Voltaire at once left the room and or-

dered his valet Longchamp, who has left a description of the scene, to secure a post-chaise immediately, to rent or purchase it, as his own had been left in Paris; the carriage was to appear at the front of the castle. He was firmly resolved to leave Commerci that very night. Astonished at the sudden resolution which had not even been hinted at the previous day, and the causes of which Longchamp did not know, he went to Madame du Châtelet to inform her of the order and to ask her for the reason. She answered that Monsieur de Voltaire was seeing ghosts, that he was excited because he had come upon Monsieur de Saint-Lambert in her rooms; he must be stopped before he could take any sensational step. Longchamp must refrain from carrying out the order given him by Monsieur de Voltaire in the excitement of the moment; she would succeed in quieting his master; he must be allowed to calm himself and be detained until the next day.

So Longchamp went to Voltaire at two o'clock in the morning and told him that no conveyance was to be had in Commerci, either to hire or to purchase. The rest of Voltaire's servants were billeted all over the city. Longchamp, only, slept in the little room next to Voltaire's bedroom. Before Voltaire went to bed he gave his valet a purse and ordered him to ride to Nancy at dawn and to bring from there a suitable traveling coach. When Longchamp saw how serious his resolve was, he wished to warn Madame du Châtelet, and found her at her desk. She asked if Voltaire was still so excited; he answered that it looked that way; he had just gone to bed, but would scarcely be able to sleep that night. She sent the servant away, telling him she would go upstairs and speak to Monsieur de Voltaire herself.

Longchamp quietly went back to his room. A few minutes later there came a knock at the door of the apartment. The servant took a light and admitted Madame du Châtelet, then went to announce her to his master. As Voltaire saw that Longchamp was half undressed he could not suppose that he had expected the visit of the Marquise. The servant lighted two candles and retired. But as the wall between his room

and that of his master was very thin, he could hear most of the conversation, and what was missing was later supplied by Mademoiselle du Thil, the confidante of the Marquise, who some time before had facilitated Voltaire's approach to the Pope.

As long as Longchamp was in the room Emily spoke English with Voltaire, so the valet understood nothing. But he heard her frequently employ a word of endearment which she often used when she spoke English to Voltaire. Then he heard in French, through the wall:

He: "What? You want me to believe you after what I saw? I have risked my health and my fortune for you, made every sacrifice—and you betray me!"

She: "My love is unchanged, but for a long time you have complained that you are sick, that your strength is leaving you, and that you can no longer make love. I am very sorry for that. Your health is very important to me; there is nobody on earth to whom it is so dear. You for your part have shown the deepest concern over my physical needs; you were even fascinated by them and assisted as long as you physically could. Now that you admit that you cannot do anything for my well-being without the greatest harm to yourself, have you the right to be angry because one of your friends takes your place?"

He: "Oh, you are absolutely right. But since things must be as they are, please see to it that at least they do not appear before my eyes."

When Madame du Châtelet saw that his agitation was quieted she embraced him and withdrew, urging him to go to bed himself.

She had no less trouble in quieting Saint-Lambert, and stopping him from challenging Voltaire because of the vituperation he had hurled in his excitement. She overcame his resistance, however, and even induced him to take the first step to a reconciliation. The next evening Saint-Lambert visited Monsieur de Voltaire on the pretext of wishing to inquire about his health. Modestly Saint-Lambert approached him and asked him to excuse the heated words of the previous day. Voltaire pressed both hands of the

young man and said: "My child, I have forgotten the words and I alone was wrong. You are at the fortunate age at which one can love and be loved. Make use of the short moments! A sick, old man like myself is no longer fit for love's amusements."

The next evening all three sat as usual at the supper table of the Marquise de Boufflers. Voltaire remained the staunchest and most devoted friend of Emily until her death; and until his own death he remained on friendly terms with Saint-Lambert. How sincere the reconciliation was, is shown by the following poem of these days on their respective positions in regard to Emily:

Et nous assemblons pour lui plaire,
Dans ces vallons et dans ces bois,
Les fleurs dont Horace autrefois
Faisait des bouquets pour Glycère,
Saint-Lambert, ce n'est que pour toi:
Que ces belles fleurs sont écloses;
C'est ta main qui cueille les roses,
Et les épines sont pour moi.

Twenty years later, in his 112th Epistle, Voltaire thanks Saint-Lambert with the heartiest words for *Les Saisons*, the work so over-estimated in its own day, on which the poet had worked so long and which had entirely satisfied Emily.

5

For a long time Monsieur du Châtelet had been manœuvring for a desirable post at the Court of Lorraine. He thought he was entitled to it, and his wife was resolved that he should get it, as a thing which was due the family. The position was that of a general, which, Lorraine being what it was, could naturally be only a sinecure. King Stanislaw would gladly have given it to the Marquis had not another man applied for it, who was an excellent soldier and the King's closest personal friend, whereas Monsieur du Châtelet bored him a little.

"Monsieur de Berchini," as Monsieur du Châtelet calls the competitor, was the Hungarian Count de

Bercsény, whose father had once led the Hungarian troops against Leopold's invading army. The Count himself had won such distinction as a cavalry general, that the bravery of his hussars became proverbial and he was later appointed Marshal of France. Small wonder that King Stanislaw wished to give this man the proof of esteem for which he asked. But Madame du Châtelet could not understand the King's hesitation. She writes to Saint-Lambert:

"If Monsieur de Berchini gets the command, it will be impossible for Monsieur du Châtelet and myself ever again to set foot in Lorraine. As long as he holds it, no position of honor, no favor, can overcome our disgust at seeing a Hungarian, and moreover a younger man than Monsieur du Châtelet, commanding in his place; and nothing will ever reconcile us to it. But my friendship for Monsieur de Voltaire would make this thought unbearable to me; judge for yourself what impression the matter must have made upon me, when I remind myself that I could have spent my life with you in Luneville and we could have jointly undertaken journeys to Cirey!"

The good-natured King, who on one hand did not wish to refuse his Hungarian friend, on the other would not offend the house du Châtelet, settled the matter by appointing the Marquis his *Grand maréchal des logis,* while he attached Count de Bercsény to himself as *Grand écuyer de Lorraine.*

The most striking part about this letter of Madame du Châtelet is that she is willing to sacrifice her hopes of living with her lover to offended ambition, while at the same time it nearly kills her to realize, as she does, that Saint-Lambert is pursuing his own ambitious plans without any consideration of the possibility, which means so much to her, of their seeing one another again. One may, for instance, compare passages like the following, dated from Trianon, April, 1749: "What right have you to be cross because I have my summer dresses sent here? . . . You who are not even certain whether you may not soon be leaving Lorraine forever? You, who would be in garrison in Flanders now, had not the Prince of Beauveau refused you! . . . You want to

be free to separate from me forever, as soon as you see an advantage in doing so. But you grumble at me for staying a fortnight longer when my health or my business demands it!" And she continues bitterly, referring to his efforts to get command of a regiment of grenadiers in order to be able to go into active French service, without regard for the fact that this would prevent her from meeting him often at the Court of Lorraine.

6

In June, 1748, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were in Paris. The rehearsals of *Semiramis* drew Voltaire there. In a letter to d'Argental he says that the actors had not rehearsed even *Mérope* with so much enthusiasm: "They got me to a point where I cried. They made its horror so fascinatingly real that even I had to shudder."

That the first performance was not an entire success was due to the circumstance that the spectators filled so much space on the stage. This spoiled the illusion at the grave of Nimus, where the ghost was to appear, but where the space was entirely taken up. The tragic mood was rudely broken by an outburst of laughter, when the guard called to the spectators who obstructed the way: "Room for the ghost, gentlemen!"

At first Crébillon and Voltaire had been friendly colleagues. With courtesy Voltaire even called himself the "apprentice" of Crébillon. But now in Paris and at the theater, Voltaire learned that among his haters it had become a habit to declare the old, nearly forgotten poet a far better writer of tragedy than Voltaire. Added to that, Madame de Pompadour had begun to take an interest in the old man. She planned to have his *Catiline* performed, and was trying to show her grateful memory of the coaching he had given her in the art of declamation when she was a half-grown girl.

Voltaire's dislike of Crébillon was due to the latter's having kept *Mahomet* off the stage; as a poet he could not esteem him; he found him rough, fragmentary, eccentric, without taste. So as Racine had

competed with Corneille over the theme of *Titus and Berenice,* and Pradon with Racine over *Iphigenie,* Voltaire now resolved to rewrite Crébillon's best-known plays *Catiline* and *Electra,* and to surpass him. He did so, with *Rome sauvée* and *Oreste.*

This quarrel was not worthy of Voltaire. But he felt called upon to show the French Court that he was superior to the one who was preferred to him. His position in the theater disturbed him deeply. The actors, feeling that his favor at Court was on the wane, no longer showed him their former devotion; they were getting stubborn and sometimes arrogant. Those who were not satisfied with their rôles no longer even said good morning to him. La Noue, who in Lille had been so enthusiastic about *Mahomet,* told everybody that *Semiramis* was a bad play. One day Voltaire, wishing to learn what the public really thought of the play, borrowed some old clothes from Abbé de Villevieille, put big spectacles on his nose, donned an immense, unpowdered wig that swallowed up his slim face, and topped the wig with a huge triangular hat. In this attire he sat one evening at a corner table in the café Procope with a newspaper propped in front of him, and waited until the performance was over and the spectators came flooding in. They came, and he heard his poor play torn to pieces.

He had become so sensitive that, learning of the intention of the Italian theater to perform a travesty of his *Semiramis,* he wrote to the Queen asking her, in return for his devotion of many years, to have the parody forbidden. The Queen answered that this was a matter that was none of her business. It cannot be said that he had made himself particularly deserving of her favor. Madame de Pompadour was good-natured enough to have the performance of the parody forbidden in Fontainebleau. Naturally, however, it was played in Paris, where every sensational play was travestied.

On his way back from Paris to Lorraine, Voltaire fell so ill in Chalons that for several days his life seemed to be endangered. The emotional strain had exhausted his vitality.

7

Madame du Châtelet required no more than a stay of three or four days in Cirey to prepare for a new journey. She and Voltaire both wanted to go to Paris for the winter. But various symptoms revealed to her that she, whose last child was now seventeen, was again about to become a mother.

Could this condition and its consequences be hidden? Could it be kept from Monsieur du Châtelet? Impossible. When Voltaire noticed how uneasy and troubled she was he asked her sympathetically for the reason. She informed him. He concealed from her the shock the news gave him, and tried to quiet her to prevent her becoming ill. He took the matter in his own hands and to begin with wrote to Monsieur de Saint-Lambert to invite him to Cirey. The next day he arrived.

It would be a mistake, if not an impossibility, to hide Madame du Châtelet's pregnancy from the neighborhood. An unforeseen accident might reveal everything. The first question was to decide upon the paternity. Voltaire said: "Don't let that trouble you! We will give the child a place among Madame du Châtelet's miscellaneous works."

Monsieur du Châtelet, who was in Dijon, was asked to come at once to Cirey to adjust a family matter and prevent a law-suit.

He soon arrived and was greeted by his wife with friendly caresses. Madame du Châtelet invited to the château several country gentlemen to make his stay pleasant. Little fêtes were given, and theatrical performances. In the forenoons the Marquise discussed domestic matters with her husband; he visited his tenants, his forests, his iron-foundries, went hunting with his guests, and after acquiring an appetite, they ate and drank well. The Marquis told of the war in Flanders; all listened with interest. Voltaire was full of the drollest ideas, so that one never stopped laughing.

Madame du Châtelet presided at the table in the most becoming attire and, seated next to her hus-

band, artlessly told him delightful things which he had not heard since they were first married many years ago. He was astonished to notice that his wife seemed to him fifteen years younger; he fell in love again. Ridiculous as it seemed at that time for a husband to court his own wife, he again became gallant. Madame du Châtelet seemed astonished and became reserved. The resistance he felt he had to overcome increased his desire, and his wooing became so ardent that the resistance gave way.

For the first time in fifteen years, the Marquis du Châtelet occupied the same room as the Marquise and thus for the whole month he stayed at Cirey. When time was up and he had to return to garrison, he heard with great joy a confession his wife made to him; although she was not sure, she thought, etc. With masculine pride he at once told the guests at the château of the happy impending event.

The famous couple again journeyed to Paris where Emily was occupied with the introduction to her translation of Newton, at which she was working feverishly before she had to stop mathematics and astronomy to carry out her problems as a woman.

The correspondence between Voltaire and Frederick was so confidential that not even Madame du Châtelet's pregnancy remained unmentioned in it. Frederick, who was then anxious for companionship with Voltaire, insisted that Voltaire had promised to spend two months in his company and seized on this news like a falcon on its prey: if Emily has to go into childbed she really does not need Voltaire for that. Frederick writes (June 10, 1749):

"I want to study with you. This year I have some spare time. Who knows whether I shall have any during any other year."

He rejects Voltaire's constant excuses of undermined health.

"One influences his body to do what he wishes. The soul cries, 'March!' And the body does it. This is one of your own mottoes, of which I wish to remind you.

"So Madame du Châtelet is going to be confined in the month of September; you are no midwife; she can do very well without you in childbed. . . . By

the way, remember that the pleasure one gives people without being importuned is enjoyed far more than the pleasure for which one has been begged.

"I scold you because the gouty always have to scold. You, of course, can do as you please, but you cannot deceive me, and now I shall learn whether you really care for me or whether all you told me was only empty words."

How strong Voltaire's attachment was to Emily, in spite of everything, is shown by his refusal (Cirey, June 29, 1749):

"Neither Monsieur Bartenstein nor Monsieur Bestucheff, mighty as they are, nor Frederick the Great, before whom the two tremble, can prevent me from keeping an obligation which I regard as absolutely binding. I am no father, no physician, no midwife; but I am a friend, and not even for the sake of Your Majesty am I willing to leave a woman who will perhaps die in September. It seems as if her lying-in may develop seriously. But I promise You, Sire, if she gets over it I will pay you my respects in October."

In the meantime the poor Marquise gave very little thought to her unselfish friend. Her distrustful attitude toward Saint-Lambert had changed, her outbursts and accusations had yielded to a great, indescribable tenderness, that of one who quietly bids farewell to life. The last letter she wrote to him, the last she wrote at all, begins: "You know me very little; you do my heart injustice, if you think that I could exist for two days without a letter from you, if it were possible to get one. You do not feel it a misfortune to do your sick-watch the first thing upon your arrival, but that does not help the impatience with which I bear your absence. When you are with me I can easily reconcile myself to my condition, I even forget about it; but when you are gone, everything seems black."

Madame du Châtelet had written to her friend, Mademoiselle du Thil, in Paris. She came and stayed with her during the last part of her pregnancy and during the birth. With her cool-headedness and because of her dark forebodings the Marquise had put all her letters and papers in order, with everything in

separate envelopes on which she wrote the addresses, and gave the whole packet to Longchamp with instructions to take good care of it.

Finally the much-feared hour came, and Madame du Châtelet gave birth, during the night of September 3, 1749, to a little girl, without difficulties or complications. The child lived but a few weeks, however.

During the first few days after the birth, the Marquise felt somewhat weak, but otherwise very well. On September 10, her condition became very serious. She suffered a choking fit. Those present ascribed this to the fact that, because of the intense heat, she had drunk a glass of ice-cooled almond milk. When the choking-fit ceased it seemed as though the patient would fall asleep. The guests at the château wished to take their supper while she was sleeping, and went to Madame de Boufflers. At the bedside remained only Monsieur de Saint-Lambert, Mademoiselle du Thil, a chambermaid, and Voltaire's valet Longchamp. The patient exchanged several words with Saint-Lambert and fell asleep. Ten minutes later those present heard a rattling sound. She had become unconscious; and a few moments later she was dead.

Monsieur du Châtelet, Voltaire and the other guests hurried back from supper, but when they reached her room they found only the body. Voltaire and Saint-Lambert were the last to leave the bedside. Then Voltaire went down the steps which led to the park. At the foot of the outer stairway he fell, hitting his head on the stone pavement, and stayed there motionless. His lackey and Saint-Lambert, who happened to pass, tried to bring him to and helped him up. He was scarcely on his feet when, with tears in his eyes, he cried to Saint-Lambert: "You have killed her!"

After a few days when he was calmer, Voltaire remembered that a carnelian ring set with brilliants had been removed from the hand of the deceased. He asked Longchamp to open the back of it without being seen and remove his portrait, which was there. This miniature must not be seen by Monsieur du Châtelet, in case the ring were to be opened. He learned to his astonishment that Madame de Boufflers,

at the instigation of Monsieur de Saint-Lambert, had taken the ring and removed the portrait; however, it was not Voltaire's likeness, but that of his young rival. "Heavens!" he said, "that's the way women are. Because of me Richelieu's picture was removed; Saint-Lambert, in turn, has driven me out."

King Stanislaw paid Madame du Châtelet every honor in his power. He ordered all the high officials of his Court to attend the funeral. He showed his friendship to Voltaire by visiting him several times daily and sharing his grief.

Voltaire had become accustomed to think he would spend the rest of his days with Madame du Châtelet. Now he felt lost; he thought of retiring in solitude to a clerical friend of the Châtelet family, Dom Calmet at Senones Abbey; then he thought of going to England and accepting Bolingbroke's hospitality. He gave up both ideas.

At first he accompanied Monsieur du Châtelet to Cirey where many things had to be settled and much had to be packed for the departure. He was not afraid to see Cirey again where he had spent such peaceful years. "I love Cirey," he wrote to d'Argental. "I cannot bear any longer to see Luneville where I lost her in the saddest way. But I like to see the place which she made beautiful. I have not suffered merely the loss of a loved one. I have lost half of myself, a spirit for which mine was made, a friend for twenty years. The most adoring father loves his daughter no differently."

Voltaire had to spend several weeks in Cirey, packing books, furniture and valuables of various kinds, that had collected in his apartment. The statues and busts, which might be damaged in transportation, were packed into empty barrels, and all of this was addressed to Paris.

Some time before, Voltaire had loaned Monsieur du Châtelet forty thousand francs for the restoration and beautifying of Cirey. As the Marquis was not in a position to make such a large payment, Voltaire accepted ten thousand francs, gave a receipt for the rest, and the two men separated in the most friendly way. Neither laid eyes on the other again.

Emily du Châtelet, one of whose virtues it was never to say a mean thing, never to listen to or to indulge in gossip, to whom every sort of slander was unknown, was after her sudden death a prey to the tongue of society. That she had come to childbed at forty-one was, to contemporary opinion, indecent, even ridiculous. Nobody spoke of the moral side of the matter, but there was scandal over the question of age. Women at that time matured much earlier and aged much more quickly than now.

In Paris an epigram was in circulation, which was ascribed to Madame du Deffand—unjustly, because it can be found in the works of Frederick the Great. In it he gives vent to his anger at the woman who was to blame for his having had so long to do without Voltaire. The verses are witty and malicious, but unworthy.

Ci-gît qui perdit la vie
Dans le double accouchement
D'un traité de philosophie
Et d'un malheureux enfant.
On ne sait précisément,
Lequel des deux l'a ravie.
Sur ce funeste événement
Quelle opinion doit-on suivre?
Saint-Lambert s'en prend au livre,
Voltaire dit que c'est l'enfant.

8

Voltaire moved into the Paris house where he had resided with Madame du Châtelet. Monsieur du Châtelet sold him his share in it. The only people Voltaire would allow near him were his notary, his nephew, Abbé Mignot, and the two friends of his youth, Richelieu and d'Argental. They came in turns to give him their sympathy.

But he could not brood over his sorrow. He was kept busy with his work for the theater, his *Catiline* and *Oreste,* written to outdo Crébillon.

Le Kain says in his *Note sur Monsieur de Voltaire:* "For thirty years Paris had not seen such an organized attempt to howl down a play as at the premiere

of *Oreste*. It was hissed from five to eight o'clock. Finally, however, the audience prevailed over Crébillon's cat-callers, and expressed their admiration. Enthusiastically Voltaire leaned half-way out of his loge and called wildly: 'Applaud, applaud! brave Athenians! It is like Sophocles!' "

The relative success of the production was followed by a flood of libelous scribblings.

These vulgarities had at least one good effect upon the sensitive poet, in that they kept him from brooding constantly over his bereavement. It was out of the question for him to remain alone: he must have somebody to run his household. At Christmas, 1749, his eldest niece came, the stout Madame Denis, who was devoted to him, otherwise as ordinary as Madame du Châtelet had been extraordinary. She looked after his house to the time of his death.

9

We have seen that Frederick had no scruples about what means he used to have Voltaire come to him. He had letters from Voltaire put into the hands of influential persons in France, about whom something outrageous was said in the letters. It is amusing to see how Voltaire tried to guess the identity of the "dishonest postmaster" who was opening his letters and revealing their contents. Only years later did he find out the truth.

Frederick wanted to have Voltaire near him. Now, after the death of the person who had kept him away, Voltaire still remained in France. Voltaire heard the rumor that Frederick was thinking of making Fréron his literary correspondent in Paris. He did everything to prevent this, and wrote his royal friend a letter which contains these lines:

"I am informed that a certain Fréron has been proposed to Your Majesty. Permit me to inform you that for this position of literary correspondent you need a man who possesses the confidence of the public. Fréron has no such standing. His reputation is tarnished and he is generally despised, etc."

Scarcely had Frederick used this trick when he invented another. Hoping Voltaire would fly into a rage and would see the necessity of going to Berlin to defend his standing, the King addressed four incredible stanzas to the minor poet D'Arnaud Baculard, the gist of which was: France's Apollo is nearing his decline. He is setting, you are rising. His sunset heralds your more gorgeous dawn.

It is scarcely possible that Frederick meant one word of this. But every line was a slap at Voltaire, calculated to sting him into action and to drive him from the Seine to the Spree.

There was scarcely anything more responsible for Voltaire's resolve to leave France.

With half-diplomatic, half-joking canniness Voltaire asked Frederick to send him his traveling expenses, as he would have to make a loan in Berlin. He got the answer he had hoped. But to his request for a sum which would enable him to take along Madame Denis, the King, who did not care for the society of women, gave a cool refusal, as he had when Voltaire had wished to take with him Madame du Châtelet.

So it is not astonishing that Madame Denis did her best to dissuade her uncle from making the journey. She disliked and distrusted Frederick. She was conceited about her position as housekeeper to a famous man and did not wish to see herself robbed of it. She said that Berlin was the sort of capital that Paris was at the time of Hugh Capet. Informed of her remarks, the King exclaimed: "What? Why should I bring misfortune upon a man whom I love, who for me sacrifices his country and everything that is dearest to him!"

Frederick wrote a letter to Louis asking for his gentleman-in-waiting. As we know the King did not like Voltaire, the Queen liked him still less; even the favor of the royal mistress had diminished somewhat after his tactless familiarity. As the King, not merely without reluctance but as though France were being honored, had permitted Maupertuis to accept the presidency of the Academy in Berlin founded by Leibnitz, Voltaire assumed that he would take Fred-

erick's latest request as reflecting honor upon France. But Maupertuis had been popular at Court and among his colleagues—whereas Voltaire was deeply hated. The same writers who several months ago had used their best efforts to injure him, now called him a deserter.

Voltaire's petition for permission to depart was answered telling him that he was free to attach himself to the King of Prussia, but that he could not retain the title of Historian to the King of France. He could, however, retain the title of *gentilhomme ordinaire de Sa Majesté,* as well as his pension of two thousand francs.

Among those who expressed joy in welcoming Voltaire to Berlin was Maupertuis, who felt sure that he would become "the pride of the King" and "the glory of all feasts." Buffon, however, writes in a letter to the Abbé le Blanc: "Maupertuis informs me that Voltaire is going to stay in Prussia, and says that he is a great acquisition for a King who has so much talent and such good taste. I believe that Voltaire's presence will be less pleasing to Maupertuis than to anyone else; the two men are not made to be together in one room."

III

PRUSSIA

1

Several years previously Frederick the Great had written to Voltaire: "I doubt if any such person as Voltaire exists, and I have a reason for doubt. It is impossible that one man could do all the tasks that are credited to Monsieur de Voltaire. Apparently there is in Cirey an academy, composed of the elite of the world, philosophers who translate Newton, epic poets, Corneilles, Catulluses, and Thucydideses, and all their works are published under the name of Voltaire, just as one credits the commander-in-chief with the deeds of his army."

In July, 1750, Voltaire arrived in Potsdam and was received like a demigod.

The King was not the only one who enthused over him. Every day a cover was set for him at the Dowager Queen's table and also at that of the young Queen Frederick who, deserted, lived in Schönhausen outside of Berlin. Frederick's brothers, the Princes of Prussia, appeared in Voltaire's plays. He went over their rôles with them affably and unsubmissively arousing their animation as he knew how to arouse it in all.

Because his health was delicate and his digestion weak, he preferred to omit Frederick's luncheons: "There are too many generals and princes," he used to say. But at the King's evening parties he was indispensable. These were exceptionally gay and entertaining.

The society consisted of enlightened spirits, mostly from France but also from other countries, whom Frederick had gathered around him. The conversation was in French.

There was that charming adventurer, the Marquis of Argens, attractive and learned, whom the King, as was his unfortunate habit, now humiliated, now honored.

There was La Mettrie, the famous cynic and physician, whose researches in natural history were far ahead of his time, a keen scientific man whose abilities not even Voltaire could appreciate. Voltaire was disgusted with La Mettrie's atheism, for which Frederick, though a deist himself, did not reproach him. He had been expelled from Holland and France, and was homeless until Frederick gave him shelter.

There was the brave soldier Chasot who had proved his heroism in many battles. He had been with Frederick since 1742; but he had grown tired of Potsdam and returned soon afterward to Paris, on the pretext of ill-health, since the King never liked to have anyone leave him.

There was the gentle Venetian, Count Algarotti, mathematician and Newtonian, who had visited Madame du Châtelet at Cirey. To him Voltaire addressed the humorous Epistle 75, when the King of Saxony had conferred on Algarotti the title of *Conseiller de guerre.*

Brillant et sage Algarotti
A qui le ciel a départi
L'art d'aimer, d'écrire et de plaire,
Et que pour comble de bienfaits
Un des meilleurs rois de la terre
A fait son conseiller de guerre
Dès qu'il a voulu vivre en paix.

Also among Frederick's guests was the exiled Scotchman George Keith, who was usually called "My Lord Maréchal" because the Scotch title of Marshal was hereditary in his family. When Frederick ascended the throne Keith was sent to France as his ambassador extraordinary. Keith not only remained faithful to Frederick until his death but stayed near him. When he was younger he had lived with a little Turkish girl who had been captured at the taking of Oksakoff; at the age of eighty he stated that Père Sanchez' treatise *De matrimonio* had aroused in him

the desire to get married, but then he was all his life a witty, good and honest man.

There also was the once intimate friend of Voltaire and Emily, Moreau de Maupertuis, mathematician, physicist and astronomer, one of the first to defend Newton's doctrine of differential and integral calculus and to side with him against Descartes. He was, as we saw, made president of the Berlin Academy; but in spite of the friendship with which Voltaire and Emily du Châtelet had treated him in Sans-Souci, it was not possible for him to see in Voltaire anything but an unpleasant rival. With Algarotti, Clairaut and several others he had undertaken the scientific expedition into Lapland. By measuring the degrees Maupertuis had established the correctness of Newton's doctrine of the flatness of the earth at its poles. In Torneá he let two sisters make love to him, and he eloped with them to Paris; vainly their father brought suit against him. He had had the rather innocent vanity to have a portrait painted of himself in his sleigh, with fur coat and cap.

Voltaire wrote under this portrait the flattering lines:

> Ce globe, mal connu, qu'il a su mesurer,
> Devient un monument, où sa gloire se fonde,
> Son sort est de fixer la fortune du monde,
> De lui plaire, et de l'éclairer.

At first Voltaire's relations with all the guests of the King were excellent; with the King himself they were delightful. In a letter to d'Argental, from Charlottenburg, August 20, 1750, Voltaire writes: "Frederick the Great resembles Marcus Aurelius in every particular, with the single exception that the Roman Emperor wrote no verses, while Frederick is an excellent poet." He has, the letter states, an even richer imagination than Voltaire himself, though of course less technique. The King therefore asks him to correct verses for him and far from resenting his corrections (as the tyrant Dionysius had done with Philoxenes) he thanks him a thousand times for doing so. The King's prose fully equals his verses; it is admirable.

His only fault is that he writes too fast. He was never told this by his courtiers; he learns it from Voltaire. It is not enough to say that the King is a great man: "He is the best man in the world or I am the most ignorant." Philosophy has perfected his character; he has perfected his nature in the same way that he is now perfecting his works.

The conversations at the King's table were, as a rule, brilliant. There were only bright people at the table and all were tuned to one key.

Frederick knew how by contradictions to provoke them to give their best. The themes were morals, philosophy, history, religion. These were skeptics and cynics talking, and their emancipation was absolute. There were orgies of mockery at dogmas and prejudices; the most wanton jokes about the Bible and the Apocalypse, about the Church and its servants; and the strangest jests about well-known contemporaries, monarchs, courtiers and writers.

Not much wine was consumed, but they became intoxicated on humorous and daring ideas. The meals lasted so long into the night that the servants acquired swollen legs from standing so long.

At these feasts of wit Voltaire was the one who shone most vividly.

Nevertheless there were causes for ill-feeling between him and the King.

Voltaire had made Frederick choose between him and Fréron, after he had in his usual violent way described Fréron as a pariah. Frederick gave in; but he was not used to giving in.

Voltaire asked Frederick to defray his traveling expenses and his request had been granted; besides he had been given generous promises of future reward. Frederick, who was economical out of bitter necessity, economical to the point of avarice, felt the burden of the expense although because of his promise he could only be angry at the free hospitality which Voltaire exercised in his residence. In his teasing way he allowed Voltaire insufficient illumination and insufficient rations of sugar and coffee. Voltaire complained about this in vain.

2

This amounted to nothing. But five months after his arrival, Voltaire's good relations with the King were undermined. The cause was this:

The Elector of Saxony had issued paper money, so-called tax certificates, which had dropped to half their face value. After Frederick's victory over Saxony it was provided in the treaty of peace that every Prussian possessing such certificates should be allowed to redeem them at their full value. This gave rise to speculation. Prussians bought certificates cheap in Holland and were paid their face value. In 1748 the scandal had become so widespread that Frederick, after Saxony had appealed for help, prohibited the certificates entirely in Prussia.

We have seen what a strange mixture of the grand seigneur and the business man Voltaire embodied. He gave the actors, as a rule, even if he was dissatisfied with them, the entire receipts from his plays. The profits from his books he gave various people regardless of the fact that the publishers enriched themselves at his expense.

As he counted on neither the theater nor literature as a source of income, he set to work to make his fortune partly through deals on the grain market and partly by financial speculation for which he was given opportunity by his connections. He was ardent in his condemnation of John Law, and sometimes even of the Pâris brothers who were his own bankers, and about whom he wrote the following Latin verse:

Et Paris et frates et qui rapuere sub illis

But he was keen at taking advantage of every opportunity that came his way; occasionally he even loaned his friends money at high interest; he bought and sold estates. Sometimes he seemed despicably avaricious and showed an astonishing tendency to quarrel, as in a law-suit (in 1761) against President de Brosses over a few cords of wood—a suit in which he was very much in the wrong.

Shortly after his arrival at Berlin he got in touch

with two Jewish business men, Abraham Hirschel and son. In September he loaned the father 4,430 thalers, for which the latter gave him a promissory note; he communicated with the son who had a jeweller's shop in November, 1750, and borrowed a number of diamonds which he wore in the rôle of Cicero at the performance of *Rome sauvée*. On one of these occasions Hirschel probably drew Voltaire's attention to the fact that one could do good business and make money by buying and selling Saxon tax certificates.

One cannot assume that Hirschel left Voltaire in any uncertainty about the edict of May 8, 1748, which strictly prohibited such business. But Voltaire came from a country in which protection by one of high rank, not to mention a reigning monarch, would have exempted him from the law; so he probably had not the faintest doubt that a special favorite of the King would be regarded in Prussia as an exception, to whom the law did not apply, and that his financial business would be excused should it not remain entirely secret. He did not yet know anything about Prussian discipline.

He ordered the younger Hirschel in November, 1750, to go to Dresden and purchase 40,000 francs worth of certificates. The King learned of this and it is not astonishing that he was incensed. As soon as Voltaire heard of the King's indignation he knew what a folly he had committed, and not content with giving an immediate counter-order and protesting his own promissory note, he denied having given any order to purchase tax certificates and tried to put an entirely different interpretation on the episode. He said he had asked Hirschel to purchase jewels and furs for him. As if Voltaire had been a jeweller, and as if one would buy furs in Dresden!

A disgusting lawsuit ensued, in which Voltaire fought for no pecuniary gain, but for his honor and his position at the Prussian Court. He did so by resorting to any means, including misrepresentation that was nothing short of perjury; whereas the Jew turned out to be truthful when it was not necessary to lie, lying when he thought a lie would succeed, and

enjoyed being in a position to compromise a famous personage.

The degrading thing about it for Frederick the Great, regardless of how the suit resulted, was that a royal Prussian chamberlain with the Order of Merit and an annual income of 20,000 francs, was engaged in a lawsuit with a notorious Jewish agent over a forbidden business transaction. It was a blow to his pride that this man whom he had regarded not only as a genius but as a friend, now a guest at his palace, engaged with the rabble in the pursuit of illegal gain.

The sad thing to us is that, taught by the war that French society had waged against thinkers, Voltaire had come to regard the lie as a justifiable stratagem and was thus persuaded to jeopardize the noblest and finest things in his life, everything he had worked for and won in twenty years, because of a miserable quarrel over a sum of money which he did not even need.

But the matter is more tragic. This wretched lawsuit was the source not only of Frederick's sudden contempt for Voltaire's character, the weakness of which he interpreted quite wrongly as avarice, instead of choleric quarrelsomeness, but also of the German contempt for Voltaire through a century and a half.

Nobody thought of making allowance for him because of the barbarous conditions for which the whole French nation was responsible, which made falsehood the only, and often forlorn, chance to secure oneself against prison or exile.

Frederick had ordered Voltaire not to show his face in the royal presence as long as the lawsuit was going on. Hirschel was fined ten thalers for trying to repudiate his signature and was ordered to return the promissory note. Voltaire had to return the written agreement to Hirschel, or swear that none had ever existed, and had to accept certain jewels mentioned in the contract as payment for a debt of three thousand thalers.

On the same day Voltaire wrote a jubilant letter to the King, telling him that he had won the lawsuit. It was not much of a victory; it consisted mainly in

getting back his promissory note of 40,000 francs. He won no moral victory. But he wrote assuring the King of his innocence and devotion.

Frederick answered from Potsdam:

"If you wish to come here, you are free to do so. I would prefer not to hear anything any more about any lawsuit here, not even yours. As you won it, I congratulate you, and I am glad that it is over. I hope that you will have no more lawsuits—either with the Old or with the New Testament. Such dealings leave scars behind, and all the talents of the greatest French wit cannot hide the stains that such a course of action would in time bring upon your name and reputation."

3

The daily companionship of Frederick and Voltaire was resumed, even if with restraint for the first few days. Frederick now began to distinguish between Voltaire's genius and his character, which he esteemed very little.

On the whole, Voltaire was very popular at Court, and life there became apparently the same as before.

But one day La Mettrie told him something that depressed him. To a remark how greatly Voltaire was to be envied for the favor bestowed upon him, Frederick had answered: "Bah, one sucks the orange and throws away the peel!" Voltaire begged La Mettrie to tell him that he had made this up to tease him. But La Mettrie assured him that those were Frederick's exact words.

Some time later Maupertuis went to Frederick and told him that one day General Manheim had gone to Voltaire to ask him to correct his *Reminiscences of Russia;* and while they were together the poet was brought some of the King's verses for correction. Voltaire was reported to have said to Manheim: "Dear friend! Better come back some other time! Here the King sends me his dirty linen to wash. The next time I'll wash yours."

Voltaire denied positively having made any such

remark: but it is just like him, and at any rate Frederick believed it and was deeply offended.

Nevertheless, everything continued in its usual course. In 1752, however, a scientific quarrel started between Maupertuis and Voltaire's old friend König, the eminent mathematician of Amsterdam. Maupertuis believed that he had made an important discovery concerning the law of motion when he evolved the principle of least resistance. König, who was indebted to Maupertuis for his appointment as a member of the Academy in Berlin, was not in accord with him on the question of the fundamental laws of motion, and did not wish to publish a criticism, knowing the irritability of the President. Recklessly Maupertuis himself invited him to do so.

König's essay stated that apparently Leibnitz had an idea similar to that of Maupertuis, which was doubtless correct, and in support of his contention he cited a letter from Leibnitz to Professor Hermann. König must be suspected of a desire to tease. We saw how he once behaved in this same way toward Madame du Châtelet and how Maupertuis took part against her.

So apparently it amused him to play a trick on Maupertuis.

Offended, the latter stated that no such letter of Leibnitz ever existed, and when he had made sure of what he suspected, that König did not possess the original of the letter, he induced the Academy of Berlin to declare König's action a deliberate misstatement. König answered with an *Appeal to the Public.* But before the publication of this pamphlet there appeared another, *Reply to an Academician in Berlin,* in which there were many accusations against Maupertuis, including tyranny and ugly behavior toward a quiet scholar whose entire guilt lay in a scientific disagreement with him. There was not one sneering or unnecessary word in it.

Only a master of style could have written thus. There was only one man in Europe who wrote that way. That Voltaire should become involved in this quarrel, that he should attack a man who, like himself, was a daily guest at the King's table, shows an

astonishing lack of tact and judgment. And this was only a year and a half after the King had given him to understand that he wanted peace in his house and that he disapproved of Voltaire's contentiousness.

Frederick was excited. His father's blood boiled in his veins. Some one had dared to ridicule the President of his Academy! It was tantamount to ridiculing his Academy, and that was the same as ridiculing himself! He resolved to answer, anonymously, the anonymous Voltaire. Certainly the phrase "dirty linen" was behind it.

The King's answer, *Letter from an Academician in Berlin to an Academician in Paris,* is not worthy of Frederick. It does nothing but laud Maupertuis, of whom it says in stilted style: "The cities quarrel which is his birthplace."—Maupertuis compared with Homer!

The attack upon the President is assigned to the basest motive, jealousy. It had gone so far that Frederick not only wrote against Voltaire but used the words: ignorance, lying, infamy, defamation, shamefulness, etc. The language was French, the coarseness German.

They met as before at meals, talked as if nothing had happened, but how they had to restrain themselves!

When the first edition of Frederick's pamphlet came out the German critics did not know who the author was, and they treated him as if he understood nothing about the real point of controversy. But the second edition appeared with the Prussian eagle and the crown and sceptre on the cover, and all doubt was dispelled.

Had Voltaire understood how impossible the situation was, had he cared, above everything else, to preserve his good standing with the King, there would have been nothing for him to do but drop the matter.

But alas! With all his flexibility he was no courtier but a restless, unrestrained poet, and in spite of his Court manner, the most ungovernable person. Not for nothing was he the wittiest man since the time of Aristotle and Lucian. His ideas gave him no rest and he could not check his wit. Like Molière's Scapin, he

had to be up to his knavish tricks and jokes, counting, if the worst came to the worst, on being able to deny everything. For he was always anonymous. The conditions of the time made it necessary for him frequently to conceal his identity, and usually he got a great deal of fun out of doing so.

To be sure, he wrote not a single line against the King; without batting an eye, he swallowed the coarse insults that came from him. But he could not resist the pleasure of taking the skin off of poor "Marsyas," Maupertuis, who had tried to rival him, and whom the King had called "Apollon."

Maupertuis had just published a number of brief essays under the title *Letters.* These were full of ridiculous speculations and theories.

He proposed:

That a vast hole should be dug to reach the center of the earth,

that a Latin city should be built, where sermons, lawsuits, plays, everything should be conducted in Latin—so that young people could be sent there, and easily taught more Latin than they could otherwise learn in a lifetime,

that the brains of great men should be dissected, to see if they were better developed than the brains of other people,

that physicians should be paid only if the patient recovers, etc.

This book drove Voltaire wild with its absurdities and paradoxes. The result was the famous pamphlet: *The Story of Dr. Akakia and the Native of St. Malo.*

This witty little book does not strike in any respect at Maupertuis as a private man, and is free from invective or coarseness.

The most vicious personal ridicule in the whole book is Voltaire's harmless joke of calling Maupertuis a Laplander, born in St. Malo, because he was proud of his journey to Lapland.

Akakia, a physician, is worried about the plan of never getting any fee if his patients do not recover: "He wants to let us physicians starve to death; he treats us like his publishers."

Akakia is alarmed about the hole which is to be

dug to the center of the earth; it has to have a circumference equal to all Germany, which would disturb the equilibrium of Europe. The truth lies indeed at the bottom of a fountain; but to dig this fountain would be too difficult.

In the Latin city Akakia is afraid that the cooks and laundresses would also have to understand Latin, and if they should commence to learn Latin grammar nothing would be cooked and no shirts would be washed.

Now and then Voltaire does Maupertuis injustice. His clear yet not deep understanding was not sufficient for some of the President's ideas. Maupertuis had said that space was only a concept of our senses. Voltaire informs him that every schoolboy knows that space does not exist solely in our senses, like tone and color. Here it is Voltaire who thinks like a schoolboy.

The great difficulty lay in getting the pamphlet published.

Royal permission was necessary and Frederick, knowingly, would never give that. Voltaire pretended that he wanted to publish an answer to the attacks which a theologian of Zürich, Zimmermann, had written against the King and himself as freethinkers. *Akakia* was printed with this permission.

Maupertuis owing to an illness was absent from the King's suppers. Frederick and Voltaire acted as though nothing had come between them and one evening when the idea came up to compile a sort of encyclopedia to be written by the group, Voltaire at once began good-humoredly to send the King one article after another: Abraham, Ame, Athéisme, Baptême. From this sprang Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* which some time later was the source of the *Encyclopedia,* the great work of Diderot and D'Alembert.

One can easily imagine Frederick's resentment when he discovered that he had been deceived and that *Akakia* was published in Potsdam. He saw at once who was the author.

He sent his valet to Voltaire to learn where the edition was hidden. Voltaire knew nothing about it.

Meanwhile the printer confessed, so it was no longer any use for Voltaire to play the innocent. He then tried to carry the whole thing off as a joke. But the King summoned him, had the edition burned at the palace, and forced Voltaire to sign an agreement: As long as His Majesty bestowed upon him the grace of letting him live at the palace, he was not to write against the government of France, against other rulers or famous writers, but was to behave as was proper for a writer who had the honor of being His Majesty's Chamberlain.

Voltaire had to sign, of course; but he was nevertheless resolved to carry his fight through. His *Akakia* was already on the way to Dresden to be printed there. Soon afterward the book was joyfully read in Berlin, where Maupertuis was disliked for his arrogance.

Frederick raged. Maupertuis was to have satisfaction. The copies that could be seized were burned by the hangman at street corners of Berlin, and before the house in the Taubenstrasse, in which Voltaire lived. This ridiculous brutality was enacted by Frederick on Christmas evening, 1752, eighteen years after Louis had had Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques* burned. In this the Kings resembled each other.

Frederick still looked on Voltaire as a great writer, but as most malicious.

Voltaire sent Frederick his chamberlain's key, his Order of Merit and his appointment as Royal pensioner, and wrote devotedly, almost tenderly:

> Je les reçus avec tendresse,
> Je vous les rends avec douleur;
> C'est ainsi qu'un amant dans son extrême ardeur
> Rend le portrait de sa maîtresse.

The same day everything was returned to him.

4

Voltaire had only one thought: to get away. But that was very difficult; he could find no excuse except the demands of his health. Frederick disliked to see

anybody leave his entourage; he could not dispense with Voltaire.

Voltaire for a quarter of a year had to play the rôle of an invalid. His assertion to Frederick that he needed the baths in Plombières made no impression. The King answered that there were excellent baths near by, in Glatz, in Silesia. But finally Frederick had to yield: Voltaire was at liberty to leave his service whenever he pleased. In a letter he demands, however, that Voltaire first return his chamberlain's key, his appointment to office, his Order of Merit, and a volume of poems which the King had loaned him. The letter expresses the strange belief that Voltaire now would begin to attack his writings.

Unfortunately, with all the other matters he had to consider, Voltaire forgot to return what had been demanded; he forgot all the more easily seeing that upon his arrival at Potsdam from Berlin, he was closeted with the King for two hours in friendly conversation, and after that was entertained at supper for six successive days.

One morning when the King was reviewing his troops it was reported to him: "Monsieur de Voltaire awaits Your Majesty's orders." The King turned and said: "Well, Monsieur de Voltaire, you really want to go?"—"Sire, I am forced to go by matters that I cannot postpone and especially the condition of my health." "Monsieur, I wish you a pleasant journey." —They both knew that they would never see each other again.

In Leipzig, where Voltaire made a stay, he added a little comic episode to *Akakia*. Then Maupertuis lost his head entirely and wrote threatening Voltaire that he would get hold of him, if he continued such writing. The next day the following announcement came out in the *Leipziger Zeitung:*

"A certain man has written to an inhabitant of Leipzig a letter in which he threatens him with murder. As attempted murder is not in keeping with the privileges of the Leipzig Fair, we request everybody to inform us should this man appear within the walls of Leipzig. He is a philosopher of distracted appearance and hurried stride; his eyes are small and round

and so is his wig; he has a flat nose and a fat, moon face, with a repulsive, smug expression. He always carries a dissecting knife to take great people apart. Whoever gives information about him, shall receive a reward of one thousand ducats which is to be called for in the Latin city which this gentleman is having built."

Frederick wrote in a letter to his sister: "Many are sentenced to be broken upon the wheel, who do not deserve it as much as Voltaire."

The King began to be possessed with the fear that Voltaire might make such a use of his letters as he himself had earlier done with those of Voltaire. He was especially nervous that he might show in France the verses in which Frederick had made fun of the French ruler and ministers. Voltaire had nothing of that sort in mind, nor did he have anything with him on the journey that had been written by the King.

In Frankfurt Frederick's anger overtook Voltaire and here was enacted the burlesque epilogue to their once perfect companionship, which became a turning-point in Voltaire's inner feelings for the Prussian King.

Frankfurt at that time was a Free City. Frederick had no authority over it. But Voltaire had scarcely arrived there when he was arrested by the Prussian resident, Herr Freytag, who forbade him to continue his journey until he had returned to the King of Prussia the things that belonged to him. This meant above all the King's poems. Voltaire thought that the book might be packed in a box which he had left in Leipzig. On June 1, he wrote for the box; he had to wait until June 18 before it came. Now Voltaire thought that he could resume his journey. But Freytag could not believe that he had been ordered to arrest this French criminal just because of a book. The order spoke vaguely of royal letters or manuscripts.

So Voltaire was arrested again.

He tried to escape, sneaked off with his secretary and got into a hired coach with one servant who carried a traveling bag. But they were missed, detected, overtaken and brought back in triumph. This flight

made the criminal still more dangerous in Freytag's eyes.

Voltaire's niece, Madame Denis, who had been waiting for her uncle in Strassburg, but who now came to join him, the secretary, and the servants, all were arrested. Two soldiers were put in front of the house door, four others were set to watch Voltaire, and four stood in front of Madame Denis' room; a policeman by the name of Dorn was even stationed in her bedroom during the night, although the poor woman, as Voltaire said, had never corrected verses for the King of Prussia.

Finally, on July 5th, the authorities came to the aid of Voltaire and after five weeks of arrest he was permitted to continue his journey. But the Prussian official demanded of him a considerable sum to cover the cost of board and lodging during the time he had been in captivity. A strange manifestation of Prussian avarice.

Certainly things had gone further than Frederick had intended, but even though he was not to blame for these stupidities, he had no one punished.

5

As a result of these occurrences Voltaire acquired a bitterness, almost hatred of Frederick. In the *Mémoirs,* written six years later, but which were published only after his death, he vents his spleen in vicious, cutting mockeries.

Frederick, too, kept a certain resentment, but it was easier for him to overcome it, as he had not been humiliated.

When the correspondence had been resumed he wrote to Voltaire: "You wronged me, absolutely. I have forgiven everything, I even want to forget everything." And then:

"Do you wish compliments? I will tell you the truth: I esteem you the greatest genius that centuries have created; I admire your poems; I love your prose, especially the brief frivolous parts of your miscellaneous writings. Never before has any writer had

such perfect tact, such a sure and refined taste. You are charming in conversation; you know how to instruct and entertain at the same time. You are the most fascinating person I know, able to make yourself loved by anyone you wish. You have so much charm in your wit that you can offend and be forgiven at the same time. In short, you would be perfect, if you were not human."

Later, when Frederick made great efforts to calm the aging Voltaire, he wrote:

"For man everything depends upon the time he is born. Although I was born far too early, I am not sorry, for I have seen Voltaire, and even though I see him no more, I read him and he writes to me."

One who reads understands that in spite of everything that separated them, these men could not do without each other. They hated and loved each other alternately in the course of a few days, or did both at the same time. After a short time the old charm, the mutual attraction, made itself felt, and the correspondence recommenced, continued for twenty-four years and ceased only at Voltaire's death.

One period seems to me especially worth mentioning: that from June to November, 1757.

In 1756 Austria entered an alliance with France and Russia against Frederick. When Frederick invaded Saxony, Sweden and the Electors joined the alliance. A population of a hundred millions stood against a nation of five millions—after the defeat of Kolin, on June 18, 1757, it seemed as if everything were over with Frederick. He carried with him a phial of swift poison, resolved to use it if his luck should not turn, and he wrote a letter in rhyme about it to his friend d'Argens. It is the poem which begins: *Ami le sort en est jeté*:

"The die is cast. Tired of the misery and bad luck, with which our Mother Nature has filled my life, I shall shorten my days. Farewell, greatness, farewell, divine ambition! I do not seek solace in religion. I know from my teacher Epicurus that the spark of life is not immortal. But strew my grave with roses and myrtles."

In a letter to Voltaire he likens himself to the

heroes of liberty, Cato, Brutus, who fell by their own hands.

It is tragicomic that Frederick sends even this poem, in which he describes in bitter earnest his thoughts of suicide, to Voltaire, to have him correct it. With good sense the latter answers that the problem for him is not how to perfect these verses, but how to save the King's life for his own sake and for that of humanity. To distract the King from his thought of suicide he boldly tells him that nobody would compare him with Brutus or Cato: "Nobody is going to look on you as a martyr to liberty. One must look facts squarely in the face. You must keep in mind how many Courts there are who see in your invasion of Saxony a violation of international law." Frederick's death would only be a tremendous triumph for his foes and for the enemies of philosophy.

Frederick answered Voltaire on October 9, 1757, with a fine, manly poem. It begins:

> Je suis homme, il suffit, et né pour la souffrance;
> Aux rigueurs du destin j'oppose ma constance.

Believe me, he says, if I were Voltaire and a private person, I would meet the shift in fortune with equanimity. I know what it means to be disgusted with praise, I know the burden of obligations, and I know a flatterer when I see one. I know how to think, live and die as a King.

As soon as Frederick's sister, the Margravine, informed Voltaire of her brother's desperate intention, he had the idea that the King, to survive, would have to make peace with France. As Voltaire had been friendly, ever since they were in school, with the Marshal of Richelieu, who led the French armies, he advised the King to give him a letter to deliver to Richelieu.

Frederick thereupon wrote a dignified but cleverly flattering letter to Richelieu, and Voltaire delivered it. Richelieu answered Frederick that he had no authority to conclude peace, but that he had sent the letter to his master, King Louis.

And now Voltaire began to work passionately in the matter, not so much because of his friendship for

Frederick—for sometimes he hated him—but because it offended Voltaire's reason that something so precious and rare as Frederick should be destroyed. Also, Voltaire believed that peace was the best thing for France. He knew that Frederick even in the direst straits was an immense power, and France might suffer if this military genius were driven to desperate measures. By bringing together the Cardinal de Tencin and the Margravine de Bayreuth, he tried to influence the Prime Minister, Abbé de Bernis.

But Madame de Pompadour was definitely on the side of Austria. Frederick had written verses ridiculing her, whereas Maria Theresa had sent her a letter filled with professions of her hearty affection. Bernis was a statesman. Frederick received no answer. He could not be surprised at that. He had written of Bernis: "Evitez de Bernis la sterile abondance!" And of the King:

> Quoi! Votre faible monarque
> Jouet de la Pompadour,
> Flétri par plus d'une marque
> Des opprobres de l'amour . . .
> Cet esclave parle en maître.

Then suddenly he gave France the most humiliating military defeat she had ever experienced. The battle of Rossbach was fought November 5th. With an army half the size of the French he routed first the cavalry, then the infantry, until the entire army took to its heels with Frederick's cavalry in pursuit. He captured 5,000 men, including five generals and 300 officers.

Voltaire writes to d'Argental: "Frederick had only some 20,000 men who were tired out by marches and counter-marches, and with these he destroyed an army of 50,000 men. What shame for our nation. . . . Now Madame de Pompadour can see that I was right when I wrote her: 'The time might come when it would be rather convenient to have a Frenchman at the Court of Berlin.' " . . . And in writing to Thiriot he says: "Posterity will be astonished that an Elector of Brandenburg, after losing a great battle against Austria, after his allies had been completely

wiped out, after he had been pursued into Prussia itself by 100,000 victorious Russians, when he was wedged between two French armies who could surprise him at any time, overcame all these handicaps, retained his conquests, and scored one of the most memorable victories of this century. . . . It is not pleasant to be a Frenchman in a foreign country now. We are ridiculed to our faces, as if we had all been adjutants of Monsieur de Soubise."

6

It seems at first as if the relation between Frederick and Voltaire took the course of a peaceful and vivid interchange of ideas for the next twenty years. But if one looks more closely one discovers a gap in the correspondence between November 1, 1760, and January 1, 1765. This time it was the King who severed relations and without adequate reason.

Frederick's anger at Voltaire was aroused because the latter was at work on a *History of Peter the Great,* for which he was eagerly collecting material. As one can readily imagine, the Russian government did not make it too easy for him. But this history was demanded by Voltaire's instinct as a companion work for the *History of Charles XII.* Peter matched his conception of a great man far better than Charles.

Frederick writes to Voltaire: "Please tell me, what is this I hear about your writing the history of Siberian bears and wolves? And what can you say about the Czar that you have not already said in your *History of Charles XII?* I do not want to read the history of these barbarians. I would prefer to ignore the fact that they even lived in our hemisphere." Frederick mentioned this matter again and again, and did not spare strong words.

The other reason that caused Frederick to cease corresponding with Voltaire for years was Frederick's hatred of Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour which found expression in the most mocking verses. And in 1761 Voltaire's *Tancrède* appeared with a dedication to Madame de Pompadour. Although this

was carelessly worded with the result that it irritated the favorite, it seemed to Frederick so flattering that he was indignant. He wrote to d'Argens: "The Epistle of dedication was written by a fellow who blows hot and cold, who can mock or flatter to order, regardless of his subject. . . . Compare certain verses in *La Pucelle* with this dedication and admit that only a rogue could dishonor himself by such a two-faced action."

In this judgment Frederick is unfair. Had Madame de Pompadour, whose advances he never answered, been of noble blood, he would have nourished no more prejudice against her than he had against the Duchess de Châteauroux, to whom he wrote repeatedly. Had he not constantly teased Voltaire to let him read the poem on Jeanne, he would never have known of those unfortunate lines which Voltaire did not incorporate in his final edition of *La Pucelle,* and which he was sorry he had ever written, for he really had a very high opinion of Madame de Pompadour and after her death wrote sadly to his friends: "She was one of us."

The correspondence was resumed when, at the end of 1764, Frederick was seriously ill; Voltaire asked after the health of the King and the latter sent him on January 1, 1765, a polite answer.

7

But Voltaire had enough of serving kings by this time. In the republic of Switzerland, he became a king himself, the intellectual monarch of his whole century.

What Voltaire owed to his life with Frederick is difficult to set down precisely. But one can notice it. In the atmosphere around Frederick, Voltaire's philosophical keenness flourished. Frederick's strength of will gave him courage. Until then Voltaire had not been a fighting writer. Since his *Philosophical Letters* (1734), his work had been purely literary or scientific. His attacks on social institutions were masked so that he could deny them if an emergency arose.

Take the astonishing case of his *Mahomet*. It certainly is intended, first to last, as an attack upon revealed religion, but it is so written that Voltaire could, in 1745, dedicate it to Pope Benedict XIV.

Now Voltaire no longer dedicates books to a Pope, although he keeps up good relations with Benedict and when he petitions for relics for the church in Ferney he gets the hair-shirt of his patron-saint, Francis.

The intercourse with Frederick gave him the courage to oppose the belief in any so-called Revelation. The close friendship with Frederick increased his prominence among his contemporaries. For the first time since Aristotle and Alexander, a great writer was the friend and adviser of a King, after being his teacher.

This is not the place to enlarge upon what Frederick was as a monarch. Ruthless in his work as a founder of a state, hard, painstaking and gifted, he created Prussia and through it modern Germany. He was far ahead of his times. In his phrase *Je serai le roi des gueux*, he expressed his intention of founding a kingdom of a kind then unknown.

As a measure of his greatness one may take this: he, and he alone among the Kings, dared declare himself a free-thinker, dared in that dark age to let so-called religious crimes go unpunished and to show on all occasions a heathen philosophical spirit.

None dared this in the nineteenth century, the century of reaction. No Emperor or King—not even Napoleon—no minister in any monarchy—not even Bismarck!

That Frederick dared this, was the work of Voltaire.

It is Voltaire's greatest achievement as an historian that he wiped out superstition and shook the churches which supported it and which were supported by it.

Now he ceases to be merely a thorn in the flesh of the ecclesiastics. In his solitude he works as the great protector of the downtrodden and the outcast. He is their helper, their defender, the one who fights for their rights during life, protects their honor after

death. The haughtiest rulers tremble before him, the blood bespattered judges grow pale at the mention of his name. Without his inspiration the *Encyclopedia* would not have been written; without his interference the worldly power of the Catholic church would not have been so undermined that only a dozen years after his death the French Revolution caused it to collapse.

IV

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

1

Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose name has been linked with that of Voltaire by posterity, did not mean much to Voltaire in his lifetime.

Voltaire was more than half a century old, and very famous, when Rousseau first came in contact with him.

The Duke de Richelieu requested Rousseau to adapt Rameau's music to Voltaire's text of *The Princess de Navarre*, for the performance at Court.

Rousseau sends Voltaire the revision: "Monsieur, for fifteen years I have worked to make myself worthy of the regard and care with which you favor the young writers in whom you discover some talent." —He asks him to point out where he has deviated from the fine and true, that is from Voltaire's original ideas.

Voltaire answers like a grand seigneur, very politely, and indifferently: "You combine two talents which previously have always been separated, that of the musician and that of the poet. So I have two important reasons for esteeming you highly and wishing to like you. I am sorry that you are wasting these two talents upon a work which is not entirely worthy of you. But fortunately it is in your hands; you are to decide."

In Rousseau's youth Voltaire had a strong influence upon him. Rousseau said that the reading of Voltaire inspired him with the desire to express himself elegantly and to imitate the "nice coloring" of style. The *Lettres Philosophiques* turned his thoughts to England whence he was to bring, like Voltaire, thoughts that were epoch-making in France. The tragedy *Alzire* so moved him, as a spectator, that he could

not breathe, had palpitation of the heart, and was ill for several days.

Rousseau belonged at first to the little phalanx who were called *"philosophes,"* Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvetius, and others who wished to promote free-thinking philosophy and who saw in Voltaire their greatest man.

He left this group when the Academy of Dijon, in 1749, announced a prize contest for the best essay on the question: "Did the Renaissance promote morality?" Diderot asked him: "What attitude do you propose to take?"—"The affirmative, of course." "That is the *pons asinorum,*" answered Diderot, who admired the living conditions in Tahiti. "All mediocrity will take that stand. It is the negative that offers new fields to the thinking brain and the eloquent pen."

This remark startled Rousseau's development. He did not share the innocent belief of the *philosophes* in constant progress in all fields. He was an unusual type, they were the regular members of society. He was a wanderer; they were settled. He was a landscape artist, they loved wild nature, enjoyed the scenery before their eyes, the soil as they felt it beneath their feet. He was a man of instinct, made wretched by doubt, while they, being thinkers, had first to awaken the doubt. He had the natural inclination to respect, as Voltaire had to scoff. In his hatred of doubt he became doctrinaire and dogmatic.

In his books he attacked his contemporaries as parasites of men in high position. "This is the life of all our intellectuals, with one exception, Diderot." Voltaire was given this slap: "Tell us, famous Arouet, how many works of virile beauty have you sacrificed to your finesse, how many great masterpieces has that spirit of gallantry of yours cost you, who are so fertile in producing pretty trifles?"

Voltaire took no notice of this. He did not appreciate that to Rousseau it appeared impossible to be both wit and creative genius. For Voltaire was both.

Voltaire had had a ridiculous skirmish with a Monsieur Rousseau who hissed one of his plays in the Théâtre Français. He thought this Rousseau was Jean Jacques and when he made some remark about his

ingratitude, the real Rousseau was moved to write him a dignified letter in which he says at the end: "I am content to live with no reputation, but not with one for dishonesty and I would consider myself dishonest if I did not pay you the respect every writer owes you, and which all those who deserve respect themselves do pay you."

Meanwhile Rousseau began to assume a Diogenes attitude in life, as he had in literature. He changed his style of dress, discarded gold lace on his coat, gave up white stockings, put away his sword, sold his watch, wore a plain wig.—It was unthinkable to discard the wig entirely.

It was thanks to his descent and to his previous life as a lackey and a vagabond that he was content outside the habits of good society. As Madame d'Epinay said: "He could utter a pretty compliment without being polite. He was not French, but Swiss, and the Swiss, who are mountaineers, regard politeness, as some Norwegians do, as a subordinate matter."

Once he had reviled Fashion as sordid display he became the fashion.

He composed *Le Devin du Village*. The King, the Queen and the Court saw the work at Fontainebleau. Rousseau attended the performance in street clothes, unshaven and with his wig uncombed. He failed to meet the King, and lost a pension that was meant for him, because he was too weak to deny himself the chance of going out for a moment while waiting for the audience.

At that time the poor sickly man joined destinies with Thérèse Levasseur, a former waitress who was lacking in beauty and intelligence. She could not read, and did not know the year or the days of the week. This poor creature gave birth to five children, perhaps by Rousseau, perhaps not, all of whom Rousseau took to the foundlings' home. This, however, was a deep secret which was uncovered only much later. Rousseau then gave various reasons for his action, first, that it was the usual procedure, and then, that it was essential to save Thérèse's honor. In further extenuation he claimed that he had acted as a

good citizen and father by leaving his children to become laborers and farmers, instead of adventurers and fortune-hunters.

2

At the age of sixteen, Jean Jacques had been converted from Calvinism to Catholicism. When at forty-two he returned to Geneva, he again changed his religion, and was restored to his lost rights of citizenship.

He was received splendidly, and promised to settle the coming spring, that is in 1755, in Geneva.

But just then Voltaire, after his unsuccessful adventure with Frederick the Great, went to Switzerland, ostensibly to seek the advice of the famous Geneva physician, Tronchin, but in reality, as he confidentially admits, "to let his clothes dry after the thunderstorm."

He bought the estate of Les Délices, with Tronchin as go-between; for a Catholic, even if unorthodox, could not become a property owner in the Republic of Geneva. As was his habit, he at once installed a private theater.

Shortly after his return to Paris, Jean Jacques entered the contest for the new prize of the Academy of Dijon: *"The Origin of the Inequalities in Man, and the Fundamental Reasons Therefor."*

He dedicated his book to the Republic of Geneva, and in a long preface he glorifies its institutions. He cannot imagine a better constitution. The authorities are the best in the world. The priests are reverend pastors, devoted protectors of the holy dogmas, etc.

But the book, which proclaimed the equality of all people in a natural state, and which blamed society and civilization for inequality, failed to please the aristocratic society of Geneva. The council answered politely but coolly, whereas Rousseau had expected enthusiasm.

In the book Rousseau followed his paradoxical train of thought and came to the statement "the man who thinks is a degenerate animal." He meant that instinct is an independent force in intellectual life

and as it predominates over reason, it is more natural than reason. This could not be doubted, but neither was it sensational. And he wanted to be sensational.

Voltaire considered Rousseau's book on the destructive power of culture a huge joke, but Rousseau was the friend of all the encyclopedists, and Voltaire was too wise a general to disperse his troops. On receiving a copy of the book he replied good-naturedly: "I have received the book which you have written against mankind, and I thank you for it. It is impossible to paint with stronger colors the horrors of the civilization on which in our weakness and ignorance we pride ourselves so much. Never have we been condemned with so much wit. On reading one feels tempted to go on all fours. As it is, however, sixty years since I gave up this habit, I am sorry to say that I am unable to take it up again, and I leave this natural posture to people who are more worthy of it than you and I."

He calls himself a peaceful savage in the seclusion which he has chosen near Rousseau's birthplace. He is sorry to hear of Rousseau's ill health. He should recover in the climate of his native land: "Come and drink with me the milk of our cows, and if you have to go to grass, do it here!"

Rousseau, flattered, thanks him: "When I sent you my poor dreams, I did not stop to think that I was giving you something that was worthy of you; I only wanted to fulfill an obligation, and pay you the homage, which we all owe you as our leader." He thanks Voltaire for the honor he does his native land by settling there, and asks him to enlighten a nation worthy of his instruction, and to teach it to love virtue and liberty.

At last the moment came when Rousseau, who had always professed to despise Paris, was to move to Geneva; but he felt it impossible. He wished to be foremost in Geneva—and Voltaire was there. Voltaire's presence locked the doors of Geneva against him. He asked Madame d'Epinay to let him have her little house, the Hermitage, near Montmorency. The champion of equality accepted the hospitality of a banker's wife. The Spartan defender of virtue

was filled with well-being in that overcivilized society that paid the fullest homage to Eros!

3

The earthquake in Lisbon took place in November, 1755. Two-thirds of the city was destroyed and 20,000 people killed. This catastrophe made a very deep impression on contemporary society, caused people to re-examine their views of life. Compare the small impression made upon our time by the eruptions of Pelé and of Etna. The outlook of the world at that time was based on the optimism of Leibnitz: True, God could imagine all kinds of worlds but he was able to create only the best possible; if there are flaws in this world, it is only because a world without them would be impossible.

Very generally people soothed themselves with the thought that this world was the best of all possible worlds.

Now came this wholesale destruction of a city. What did it mean? One could hardly be expected to believe that the 20,000 killed were worse or more sinful than other inhabitants of the city. Where did the hand of Destiny come in here?

Voltaire, like all the unorthodox of his day, had never doubted the existence of a God. He needed a God in his physics, to make the worlds move; he needed a God in his moral code to mete out reward or punishment after death. If He did not already exist He must be invented: Inside of this fence his mental life took place.

But the destruction of Lisbon undermined his optimism; no, everything was not well. And he wrote his poem *Le Désastre de Lisbonne:* All will be well some day—that is our hope. All is well today—that is an illusion. The wise have been mistaken. God alone is right. I dare not to revolt against Destiny:

Un jour tout sera bien, voilà notre espérance,
Tout est bien aujourd'hui, voilà l'illusion.
Les sages se trompaient, et Dieu seul a raison.
Humble dans mes soupirs, soumis dans ma souffrance
Je ne m'élève point contre la Providence.

The pastors of Geneva asked Rousseau to reply. He was bitter. He thought Voltaire's attitude ridiculous: "This poor man, who is glutted with fortune and honors, spouts bitterly about the misery of life." He himself, poor and unlucky, will prove to Voltaire that everything is well, that Voltaire's God is a Devil, a creature of evil deeds.

But it is clearly not God's but mankind's fault that Lisbon was destroyed. God meant them to remain in the natural state, to live in caves or scattered huts. Then the earthquake would not have harmed them. But they herded together in great cities. Hence all the misery.

And he addressed Voltaire a long personal letter which he intended to publish later. In it he says: "May heaven keep me from offending the one of my contemporaries whose talents I esteem most highly and whose writings move my heart most deeply; but here it is destiny that is in question, destiny on which I stake everything."

Rousseau hoped for an answer from Voltaire, a dramatic conflict with the best-known man of his times, a tournament in which he would have occasion to appear as the chivalric champion of Destiny.

But Voltaire did not fall into this trap; besides he did not wish the opponents of free-thinking to see the spectacle of two free-thinkers attacking each other. Instead of a controversial theatrical treatise, he sent Rousseau a polite note: His niece is sick and he is taking care of her; he himself is not feeling at all well. Under such circumstances he prefers to put metaphysics aside. But he assures Rousseau that none of his readers esteem him more highly than he, and none—let Rousseau come to Geneva—could love him more heartily.

The real answer was written four years later. It became world-famous. It is called *Candide*.

4

Geneva was dominated by the doctrines of Calvin; plays and theaters were absolutely forbidden. Even

puppet-shows were not allowed. When D'Alembert, who was about to write the article on Geneva for the *Encyclopedia,* visited Voltaire, the latter asked if he might insert a few lines about the theater:

"The drama is not permitted in Geneva for fear of the passion for finery, diversion and levity, which it is said to engender. But Geneva ignores the obvious fact that strict laws could be enacted against that sort of thing, and the theater would be left as a good influence upon the public taste."

The objections of that time against the theater are so strange that we smile: it engenders a passion for finery. The defense seems no less strange to us.

How stubborn are European prejudices. After Shakespeare's death Puritanism closed all the theaters in England to his work. Port-Royal's condemnation of the theater induced Racine to give up writing for the stage. More than a hundred years after Shakespeare's time the Pious Party in Copenhagen did the same thing to Holberg that Calvinism did to Voltaire in Geneva.

The clergy of Geneva were in a ferment over the article in the *Encyclopedia;* Tronchin tried in vain to induce D'Alembert to withdraw it, and at first got a refusal from Rousseau when he asked him to intervene.

But when Rousseau had an inkling that Voltaire might be the author, he availed himself of the opportunity to make his rival angry, and wrote his *Letters on the Drama.*

He could not be stayed by the thought that it was not exactly fitting for a dramatic writer, librettist and opera composer to point out the menace of the theater. He was blind to everything except the desire to attack Voltaire. Voltaire had become the abstract of all he hated: Voltaire was noble, agreeable, gay; he himself clumsy, disagreeable, dour.—Voltaire was bright and maliciously witty; he himself earnest, and of a gloomy genius.—Voltaire was not pious, but liked order; he himself pious and rebellious.—Voltaire was practical and far-sighted in his political opinions; Rousseau an idealist and a revolutionary.

Finally Voltaire was everything that Rousseau envied: he was wealthy, happy and admired.

Rousseau attacks dramatic art as later did Tolstoy his great successor: tragedy is pernicious. The spectators' hearts are moved by invented sufferings, which hardens them to those that are real. Comedy is pernicious. It does not teach us not to be vicious, but not to be ridiculous. Molière's theater is the school of vice. Molière subjects his Alceste, a most upright man, to ridicule. The establishment of a theater in Geneva, a little town of 20,000 inhabitants, would destroy the city. It should have open-air festivals, parades, shooting-matches, and sailing contests. The drama is innocuous in a polluted city like Paris, but not in innocent Geneva.

Surely, his village clergyman, with the spectacle of dancing girls, had a more pernicious effect upon virtue than Molière's Misanthrope. But all this, says Rousseau, was provoked by Voltaire, even though he takes care not to list Voltaire's *Cesar's Death* and *Brutus* among the harmful plays. Voltaire remained silent.

The citizens of Geneva were delighted. Voltaire with his private theater suddenly became a bogieman. He was publicly jeered. His estate was plastered with threatening and libellous placards. So he resolved to leave the place, and sold Les Délices at a great sacrifice in order, as he writes, "to keep from being burned by the priests of Baal or Basle."

He bought two estates, Ferney and Tournay, across the border; and built two theaters. He gave private performances regularly, in Tournay, and the aristocracy of Geneva thronged the hall of his castle to see them, and even, some of them, to play in them again and again.

5

During the hiatus in the relations between the two great writers, important events occur in Rousseau's life. He falls in love with the Vicomtesse d'Houdetot and has the crazy idea that she loves him. He annoys her in vain. Her lover, Saint-Lambert, who is away

at garrison, receives an anonymous letter which warns him. Rousseau is so foolish as to accuse Madame d'Epinay of having sent it, though unquestionably it came from Thérèse; he sends rude letters to his benefactress, and on top of that gets the notion that she is pregnant and that she wishes to blame the paternity on him instead of on her lover, Grimm, who is the real father. He complains to Diderot about this wickedness.

There follows a break with Madame d'Epinay, with Madame d'Houdetot, with Saint-Lambert, with Grimm and even with Diderot, because the latter wrote in the preface to *Le fils naturel:* "Only bad people are lonely," and Rousseau imagined that this was meant for him.

Thus Rousseau broke with the entire philosophical party, and the salons where the *philosophes* were hated opened their doors to him.

He, who had flung so many accusations at the nobility, who had shown himself so uncompromising toward literary pirates, became the guest of the Marshal de Luxembourg and his wife, the Duchess, at their château of Montmorency. The Duchess, who was notorious for her levity, had by this time been deserted by her adorers; her beauty had vanished; but she had a good brain and was well educated, and she was enthusiastic about Rousseau. At her house gathered the most prominent society of France, and there he met daily the Prince de Conti, a Bourbon, who became his protector, and the Countess de Boufflers who, learned and well read, held Rousseau in high esteem. As was his habit, he imagined that the Countess was in love with him, but because of his respect for Conti he restrained himself.

While Voltaire moved in high society with absolute unconstraint, Rousseau behaved awkwardly and rudely. He returned a piece of game which the Prince de Conti sent him. The Countess wrote: "The Prince does not think much of your fastidiousness, not that he finds anything false about it, but he fears that others might take it as an affectation."

In this circle Rousseau talked against Voltaire and filled his letters with violent attacks. But Voltaire

continued to ignore it. He even offered Rousseau, several times, an estate which he had bought adjacent to his own.

For Rousseau had not yet forced Voltaire to take him seriously. To be sure, Rousseau had annoyed him when by his appeal to the medieval conception of the theater as a place of sin, he had hindered the private performance of Voltaire's own plays acted by young dilettantes in the hall of the château, and finally made those performances impossible. Never had Voltaire seen in Rousseau a rival. But Jean Jacques had always studied Voltaire, admired and imitated, hated and nagged him. Now he felt that they were fundamentally opposed as he, Rousseau, was the representative of a new principle.

The two militant spirits were not suited to live and work together. The one, the opponent of the Catholic Church, of the Inquisition, and of political tyranny, taught his contemporaries a new and critical way of looking at things, and for the first time turned satire into a weapon which can only be compared with the deadly discovery of gun-powder. The other, the fanatical preacher of penitence, the prophet of democracy, taught his contemporaries a new way of feeling, in particular a new way of feeling nature, and also a new way of thinking, which subordinated judgment to instinct.

One was first an intellectual awakener, the introducer of Newton, Locke, and Shakespeare, later the intellectual guardian of the nation.

The other was a eulogist of wild nature, an apostle of individuality, from whom sprang first the Revolution, then Romanticism.

Each exercised an influence that remained active for centuries, an influence the like of which had not been wielded since ancient times.

Voltaire was the intellectual food of generations. Courier, Byron, Heine, Edmond About, and Anatole France, go to him as a source. Rousseau has disciples like Tolstoy and Strindberg in our century. He was the progenitor of Chateaubriand and George Sand, of Herder and Goethe, whose *Werther* is descended from *La Nouvelle Heloïse,* and Schiller, whose poem

Rousseau glorifies the one who elevated mankind above Christianity.

Several times Rousseau asked Voltaire for permission to publish the letter on the destruction of Lisbon. Voltaire not wishing to enter a controversy over the existence of Destiny, refused. But as Rousseau had exhibited the letter indiscriminately, it was published in Berlin in 1760.

After excusing himself coolly and drily for the publication in a letter to Voltaire, he adds idiotically:

"I do not like you. You have inflicted upon me, your enthusiastic disciple, the deepest grief. You have polluted Geneva as a reward for the refuge it gave you. You have estranged my countrymen from me as thanks for the praises I have wasted upon you. You make residence in my native land impossible for me and you force me to die abroad, while every honor a man can achieve is bestowed upon you in my native country. I hate you because you have wished me to."

Voltaire answered never a word, but wrote to D'Alembert:

"I wish that Rousseau were not completely insane, but he is. He has written me a letter for which he deserves his own prescription of exposure in the rain and a diet of raw meat." [1]

6

At that time a small scandal rocked Geneva. A woman who, despite her irregular past, was supposed to be as virtuous as she was brilliant and pretty, and whom Voltaire had called one of the two female

[1] (12 janvier 1803) Le premier Consul: Quelle différence de ce qu'on écrit aujourd'hui à Voltaire. Plus je lis Voltaire, plus je l'aime. C'est un homme toujours raisonnable; point charlatan, point fanatique. J'aime aussi beaucoup son histoire quoique on la critique. La Pucelle ne vaut rien à la jeunesse; mais elle égaye les gens mûrs. Jusqu'à seize ans je me serais battu pour Rousseau contre les amis de Voltaire. Aujourd'hui c'est le contraire. Je suis surtout dégoûté de Rousseau depuis que j'ai vu l'Orient. L'homme sauvage est un chien.

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geniuses that ever existed, Sappho being the other, was caught by her husband with a lover.

This turned the pious little city upside down.

Such a thing was unheard of. Who and what was to blame for that? Who but Voltaire and his theater! The council most strictly prohibited any participation in the theatrical performances in Tournay. Nobody dared go there any more.

Voltaire writes to d'Argens: "We have had a cuckold in Geneva. Calvin's little community, whose virtue consists in usury, imagines that wronged husbands occur nowhere else in the world but where there are theaters."

But this time he became angry, and especially so at Rousseau, who sent a steady stream of letters to the pastors in Geneva and incited them against the plays.

7

In 1761 there appeared *La Nouvelle Heloïse,* an epoch-making novel, though a dull one. It differed from the conventional novel of the day in that it did not treat its love theme frivolously; this pleased the women. Furthermore, it talked of virtue, whereas it had long been customary to deal exclusively, and wittily with vice. This again found an enthusiastic reception, especially among the ladies. Rousseau maintained that there were few women whom he could not have conquered had he tried. He thought himself irresistible, although he had never won anybody but Madame de Warens, and Thérèse, two women without the least resistance.

The book was directed against the *philosophes* as well as against the faithful adherents of the Church. Against Voltaire's creed, which was irreligious without being atheistic, Rousseau set up his own, which was religious without being Christian.

Voltaire became still more angry. To him Rousseau was now nothing more than a wretch who had deserted his friends.—What a pity, that a man should be born with a few half-developed talents!

Voltaire wrote a number of satirical letters con-

cerning *La Nouvelle Heloïse,* which he could make the Marquis de Ximenés sign and publish, because he had once stolen and published one of Voltaire's manuscripts and thus was dependent upon him. The work is trenchant, like everything Voltaire wrote. It draws attention to numerous grammatical and other faults in the novel, but it leaves a perfunctory impression. There is not a trace of appreciation of the valuable new material made use of by Rousseau, the enjoyment of natural scenery and of a simple, unaffected mode of life. Voltaire should have pointed out that it had been a thousand years since the earth, its air and its fragrance, its colors, and its contours, had been portrayed as vividly as in Rousseau's work. He should have contrasted it to his own epic, the *Henriade,* in which not one single blade of grass could be found.

Voltaire made fun of the theoretical and impractical in Rousseau's work, for example his plan for everlasting world peace. Voltaire represents the Emperor of China as ordering all sovereigns to keep peace, under penalty of making the first violation of his edict the subject of a pamphlet by Jean Jacques.

In 1762 appeared Rousseau's two chief works, *Emile* and *Le Contrat Social.* The first is a book on education, and the second is the doctrine of the common ideal of nations and races, and the equality of men.

As there was no such thing as freedom of the press at that time, all writers remained anonymous; even Montesquieu did not admit the authorship of so purely scientific a work as *L'Esprit des Lois.*

Instead of conforming to this usual practice, Rousseau stubbornly put his name on the title page of *Emile,* which was later brought up against him by the state prosecutor as an unheard-of piece of impudence.

His work, whose valuable parts are copied from Locke's *Thoughts on Education* (translated into French in 1728), contained Christian morality without Christian dogma. He reproached mothers for not nursing their children themselves. Nurses, he said, simply hung their charges on a hook when they cried.

No man, said he, who did not fulfill his paternal duties, had any right to become a father. This immediately after he had taken his fifth child to the foundlings' home.

The Parliament of Paris, which was prosecuting the Jesuits, wished to prove its impartiality by prosecution in the opposite direction. So it pronounced *Emile* to be a work "which dares to deny the truths and prophecies of the Bible and wishes to set aside the evidence of miracles recounted in the holy books.

"The book shall be torn and burned by the executioner, and the author shall be thrown in prison."

Simultaneously, both books were torn and burned in Geneva, and Rousseau was declared under arrest if he should appear.

To Rousseau's disappointment the citizens were perfectly content with the council's decree.

D'Alembert advised Rousseau to flee to Neufchâtel, province of the Prussian King, ruled by the Scotch Lord Keith, "My Lord Maréchal," himself an exile.

Rousseau had scorned Frederick. Under his portrait in Montmorency he had written: "He thinks like a philosopher, but acts like a King."

Frederick not only gave him shelter, but sent him a large sum of money and offered him a villa, corn, wine, wood. Rousseau, with the pride of the "poor-but-proud," would accept none of it: "It would be impossible for him to sleep in a house that had been built by the hand of a King."—Thus he steadily refused the gifts, which the practical Thérèse accepted behind his back.

8

Voltaire was seated at breakfast when the mail from Paris brought him the news of the prosecution of Rousseau. He burst into tears and said: "Let him come here, he must come! I shall receive him with open arms. He shall be master here more than I. I shall treat him like my own son."

He promptly wrote an invitation to Rousseau. As he did not know his exact address, he sent copies to

seven different places, so that at least one should be sure to reach him.

Rousseau never answered and later was ashamed that he had not.

Nemesis hung over him. Some time before he had written his attack on D'Alembert, decrying the drama, in order to please the clergy of Geneva. Now the same preachers were burning his book and threatening him with prison.

But his mania held. He imagined that Voltaire was to blame for the attitude of Geneva, and told everyone so.

But Voltaire said Rousseau was a Diogenes who at times expressed himself like a Plato. "There are half a hundred pages of *Emile* which I would like to bind in morocco leather."

In every visitor who came to see him in Motiers, Rousseau fancied he saw a spy from Voltaire. He was positive he recognized his style in every anonymous letter he opened. Nevertheless, in 1763, Voltaire made another attempt to effect a reconciliation, this time through Rousseau's close friend Moulton, who was visiting Voltaire during his fight for the retrial of Calas, the most glorious deed of his life.

Rousseau declined, and called Voltaire a clown.

He also refused to take the part of the persecuted French Protestants. He said they did not deserve any sympathy from him, after the way the bigoted Protestants of Geneva had treated him.

He would not, indeed, could not, bring himself to join Voltaire as an advocate of tolerance. He was the champion of a state religion which took no account of the commandment to "love thy neighbor."

About this time Rousseau always wore Armenian attire. He had met an Armenian tailor in Montmorency. The costume consisted of jacket, caftan, lined cap, and gaudy belt, and was splendid enough not to be mistaken for a dressing-gown.

9

When the public prosecutor of Geneva wrote a book, *Lettres de La Campagne,* in defense of the

Council's attitude to Rousseau, the latter answered with the *Lettres de la Montagne,* which is a violent satire against the government and the religion of Geneva: The Protestants had become persecutors instead of persecuted. Since the Reformed Church had appealed to the right of free research, they had to put up with any interpretation of the Scriptures.

The book contained a witty passage on Voltaire, but it was a denunciation. Rousseau stated that Voltaire was the author of the daring *Sermon des Cinquante,* which ridiculed belief in the New as well as in the Old Testament. This was a work that Voltaire had always stubbornly disowned.

This denunciation, which exposed Voltaire to the most serious dangers, made his resentment boil over. "It is infamous," he writes on January 4, 1765, "to denounce and slander one's own colleague and without reason."

Voltaire so far had paid very little attention to the burning of his writings. He was always anonymous; he lived outside the jurisdiction of Geneva and had nothing to fear.

But now Geneva was full of irritation. Voltaire was accused of flooding the Republic with scandalous writings. His authorship of the *Letter of a Quaker* was just rumored, when on top of it came Rousseau's denunciation. Now Voltaire was revealed as the author of the *Dictionnaire Portatif* also. The city of Geneva seethed with righteous indignation.

Voltaire tried to play the part of the good citizen, and wrote an indignant letter to the chief of police denouncing *Le Portatif* as most dangerous. Meanwhile he was industriously smuggling heavy packages of the book across the border.

In Paris his situation was still worse. The Duke de Choiseul, the Prime Minister, had declared that the censorship must be made more stringent. The King himself had said: "Can't this man be made to keep quiet!" All letters from Paris reported that the common talk was of getting him away from Ferney and locking him up in the Bastille for the rest of his life.

Voltaire was in deadly terror. But in the midst of his fears he made joke upon joke. He wrote to Hel-

vetius: "One should never publish anything under one's name. I didn't write *La Pucelle,* either, and I shall offer proof that the state's attorney himself is its real author. As soon as any immediate danger threatens me I ask you please to inform me, so I can deny everything with my customary frankness and innocence."

At the same time he wrote officially to Paris: "The King is too just and good to condemn me on the strength of careless denunciations. He will not chastise a weak, sickly old man of seventy-one years upon so indefinite and false a charge."

It was Rousseau's denunciation that placed Voltaire in this distress.

We see Rousseau, first admiring, then envying the glory and wealth that are Voltaire's. This envy is disguised as virtue in the attack on the theater in Geneva, as piety in the attack on the Lisbon ode. Then envy grows into hatred, flaming hatred. This hatred puts on the guise of conscience: Rousseau proclaims himself the bearer of a new idea, of a principle which is radically opposed to the rationalistic Voltaire. The latter's reaction is first one of superiority, then of concealed fury at the treachery. Then comes pity and the offer of help, which is scorned. Then they denounce each other to the authorities.

Goaded and irritated past all endurance, Voltaire flung himself at Rousseau with the leap of a tiger.

Anonymously he published *Le Sentiment des Citoyens,* supposedly written by a Genevese citizen, which advanced convincing evidence of Jean Jacques' faithlessness, godlessness, and blasphemy:

"May a native of our city scoff thus at our priests? Is he a true scholar, who attacks scholars? Reluctantly we are forced to admit he is a man who still bears upon him the marks of his excesses, a charlatan who drags with him from town to town the poor woman whose children he has left at the doors of a foundlings' home."

This was an ignoble stroke, but a deadly one. Scarcely four or five people in Europe at that time knew Rousseau's secret. Nobody had ever supposed that Thérèse was anything more than his house-

keeper. Nobody suspected that she had borne children he believed to be his own, still less the fate to which they had been consigned. Whatever else was said against Rousseau, his Puritan virtue—which he mentioned at every opportunity—had gone unquestioned.

Rousseau did not know that Voltaire was the instigator of this exposé, and he sought the author among the Genevese clergy, attacked innocent men and made them enemies.

Rousseau's *Lettres de la Montagne* was forbidden in Paris, was burned in Switzerland and in Holland. He tried to publish his collected works in Neufchâtel. The Council interfered. The pastors proscribed him. Frederick the Great tried in vain to protect him. Even My Lord Maréchal doubted if the theological hatred could be overcome. As Rousseau could not stand the climate in Berlin, Lord Keith wrote to the State Inquisitors in Venice for a refuge for the persecuted man, this was refused. The same reply came from Turin, and from Vienna, where Rousseau's protector, the Prince of Württemberg, had connections. Meanwhile the population of Motiers was stirred up against him; stones were hurled through the windows of his house. Thérèse, to make it look worse, had little boys and girls carry great stones up to the open gallery of the house, to frighten Rousseau. She had had enough of the town. Incontinently he fled.

10

About this time virtuous Geneva was diverted by a comical scandal.

A Monsieur Robert Covelle was sued by a Mademoiselle Cathérine Ferboz for having had an affair with her and having got her with child. He admitted the first charge, but denied the second. In accordance with an ancient custom, he was sentenced to get on his knees and make his apology to God. He refused to kneel. He was therefore sentenced to prison. Again he refused to kneel, appealed to Voltaire for help, and the latter wrote one pamphlet after another on the

subject, as well as an epic poem entitled *La Guerre civile de Genève ou les Amours de Robert Covelle.*

As Monsieur Covelle was given a friendly welcome at Ferney at any time, he began to consider himself a famous man. Voltaire made open fun of him, and among his friends he never referred to him except by the biblical expression for his offence: *Monsieur le fornicateur.* The lackeys who had always heard him called thus, but did not know the biblical expression, thought that this was some office in the republic and to the joy of those present always announced with a bow at the folding doors: *Monsieur le fornicateur!*

The citizens took Covelle's part against the Council. In the conflict they sought Voltaire's assistance, for he was on good terms with the French ambassador, who had been appointed arbitrator. Voltaire was content: now Versailles would have a chance to see what a force he had become in Geneva. He wished to reconcile the factions which had been turned against each other by Rousseau. The French ambassador wished to see the theater in Geneva reopened. The Council dared not to resist. With great joy *Tartuffe* was performed.

From this triumphal height Voltaire offered Rousseau peace and reconciliation for the last time, Again it was in vain, although he promised to reinstate him into all his rights in Geneva.

11

Rousseau obtained a passport to cross France. In Paris he was received with indescribable enthusiasm, it was almost as though he were holding court, and despite the risk of arrest, he strutted up and down in the Garden of Luxembourg in his Armenian costume.

England, however, was considered his safest refuge. And the great philosopher David Hume, then a popular secretary of Embassy in Paris, befriended him, took him across the Channel, and introduced him everywhere in London. Parliament received him with honor. At the theater he sat in Garrick's loge. The King and Queen visited the theater to see him.

With Rousseau's permission Hume asked the King for a pension for him and it was granted.

Then curiosity slackened. Thérèse came on to join Rousseau. He wanted prominent society to invite her too. But people were not prepared to throw their social traditions overboard for him.

Hume found an excellent asylum for him in the country in Wootton, where Mr. Davenport put a house and servants at his disposal.

But the adoration lavished upon Rousseau and his constant complaints of persecution irked Horace Walpole, and this witty man wrote an outrageous *Letter from Frederick the Great to Rousseau.*

This letter went through Paris like lightning; Rousseau, however, did not see it. Then the *St. James Chronicle* printed the letter and all the journals spoke sarcastically of Rousseau. He imagined that Voltaire had written the letter and that Hume had published it and he raged against both. Besides that he got the idea that Hume was opening his private correspondence, and called him a traitor and a persecutor.

Hume answered indignantly, and exposed Rousseau as an ingrate. He did not realize that Rousseau was suffering from a mania of persecution, nor did Voltaire, often as he called Rousseau crazy.

Voltaire now took the offensive, and anonymously published his *Letter to Dr. Pansophe,* which makes fun of Rousseau and was well calculated to undermine his reputation especially in England, as it contained a collection of all the careless and foolish remarks Rousseau had made about the English.—Still worse were the notes to this letter, which pitilessly exposed the scarcely decent conduct of Rousseau in his youth, as secretary to the French Ambassador at Venice.

Confused and desperate, Rousseau fled to France, and lived there peacefully for several years.

12

In 1770 Madame Necker had the idea to erect a statue to Voltaire during his lifetime.

Rousseau wrote from Lyons to Monsieur de la Tournette: "I hear that it is planned to erect a statue to Monsieur de Voltaire, and that all who have become known by printed works are entitled to take part. I have paid dearly enough for the right, and I beg you urgently to permit me to enter my name as a subscriber." Then he sent two louis d'ors and a letter to D'Alembert:

"I hear that all those who have gained recognition by printed work are permitted to take part in this project. I make bold to claim this honor."

When Voltaire learned of this he tried hard to have the sum returned. His friends, the *philosophes* who frequented the house of Madame Necker, also considered that Rousseau should be refused, as Fréron had been, who likewise wished to contribute. But D'Alembert, for excellent reasons, would not allow that.

Eight years later Voltaire died, and Rousseau one month after. They never became reconciled.

They made one of those contrasts which history sometimes likes to bring on in pairs.

Often such opposites clash, but in a case of necessity can be reconciled, as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, or more recently Hugo and de Musset, Björnson and Ibsen.

Sometimes they are irreconcilable, like Erasmus and Luther, Corneille and Racine, Byron and Southey, Oehlenschläger and Baggesen, Heine and Borne, Wergeland and Welhaven. Only rarely do two great contemporaries feel for one another a lifelong attachment like that of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Equally unusual is it that a long-nourished antipathy turns into friendship. Goethe and Schiller furnish the great example.

In Voltaire common sense was so highly developed that it became genius.

Rousseau was diametrically opposite. In him the irrational instinct became an exalted genius that gave him his creative power, his joy in life and nature.

The things each attacked were wiped out through their efforts. Voltaire broke down the religion of the old régime, Rousseau its society.

V

IN SWITZERLAND

1

In July, 1753, after Voltaire had escaped Prussian imprisonment in Frankfort, he was splendidly received in Mainz. The Elector gave feasts in his honor at the palace, and four of his plays were performed. So it really does not seem as though the misunderstanding between him and the King of Prussia had any effect upon his position in Germany. Next he went to Alsace and lived on French soil for several months, without molestation. This led him to think that his native land would be glad to see him return.

He was, however, soon forced to change his mind. In Colmar he learned that in The Hague, Jean Néaulme had published, without his knowledge or consent, a short history of the world, which he had written for Frederick the Great fifteen years ago. It was said that the manuscript was part of the plunder taken after the battle of Sohr and that it had been sold for fifty louis d'ors by the chamberlain of Prince Charles. However it may have come into the possession of the publisher, by robbery or theft, its printing exposed the author to great danger.

Not only were there errors and inaccuracies in the manuscript, but the text had in many places been so tampered with that it could easily be construed as an attack upon the French authorities. In one place, for instance, Voltaire had written: "In this respect historians are like certain tyrants of whom they speak, who sacrifice the well-being of the entire human race to that of a single individual." Here the word "tyrants" had been replaced by "kings," which would have made it very difficult for Voltaire's friends at Court to take his part.

On top of this, fragments from *La Pucelle,* which

also had been looted from the baggage of the King of Prussia, turned up in Vienna for publication. The *Outline of World History,* however, was sufficient. It had turned the entire clergy of France against him, and his case was hopeless.

He did not know that his old school friend the Prime Minister, the Marquis of Argenson, had made a note in his diary: "August 8, 1753. The poet Voltaire is refused permission to return to France. France wishes by this little courtesy to please the King of Prussia, while in more important matters she opposes him."

Not only was Voltaire's return to Paris out of the question, but the Jesuits, whose influence was great in Alsace, were resolved not to permit him to stay there. A few years before, in 1750, in the largest public square in Colmar, an autodafé of all copies of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* had taken place. Private citizens who owned the books threw their copies on the pyre.

Voltaire as usual did everything that was asked of him to appease the ecclesiastical powers. He went to Mass, partook of Holy Communion. He wanted to recover the right to return to Paris and settle down in France. He also could not run the risk of antagonizing Frederick permanently. For a crowned philosopher is far stronger than an uncrowned. He knew that one word from the Prussian Ambassador in Paris could make his return impossible. My Lord Maréchal had frankly told his niece this. The Scotchman was devoted to Frederick, and he said this to make sure that Voltaire should not publish a single poem, a single line attacking the King. Voltaire had no thought of turning his pen against Frederick. He was in trouble enough without pressure from Prussia, because Louis XV wanted to get rid of the trouble maker.

2

Insecure as Voltaire felt, he had no idea how hopeless his position really was in France. It is easy enough to say that he ought not to have made any concessions. If one at that time refused to attend

Holy Communion he was made to do so "*par arrêt de Parlement.*"

The Church and King felt the earth quaking beneath them, and as the century progressed their maintenance became more and more difficult. The French Inquisition steadily increased in scope and power. In 1735 Voltaire had written: "In what a century we live! Today LaFontaine would surely be burned." On February 12, 1752, d'Argenson wrote in his diary: "Woe to honest men who do not keep their tongues in check!" On May 7 of the same year, after discussing with D'Alembert the possibility of continuing with the encyclopedia, Voltaire reports that D'Alembert pointed out quite conclusively that any writing done under existing circumstances would have to be concerned entirely with trivialities.—Ten years later D'Alembert, depressed and brokenhearted, writes to Voltaire: "You cannot imagine what degree of fury the Inquisition has reached. The inspectors of thought, who are called royal censors, delete from all books such words as superstition, indulgence, persecution."

If we look back at Voltaire's earlier, comparatively innocent works, we find *Charles XII* prohibited, *La Henriade* so completely suppressed that in 1728 neither silver nor gold could buy a copy in Paris. In 1733 it was "tolerated" but not legally permitted. We saw how greatly the poem *Le Mondain* jeopardized its author. The *Lettres Philosophiques* were burned by the hangman. The *Poème sur la Loi Naturelle* was likewise burned by order of Parliament. The royal edict of April, 1757, made any writing perilous.

In 1724 a resident of Montmartre was burned alive for blasphemy. On September 6, 1758, an officer of justice by the name of Moriceau de la Motte was sentenced to public penance and then to death by hanging because placards had been found in his possession which "seemed intended for public display," and he was strongly suspected of having written the contents of these placards; it is not said what they contained. He was accused of preparing to make "seditious speeches."

In 1768, a poor wretch was sentenced to the galleys

because he had asked a bookseller to take off his hands a few books which he had received as payment of a debt. The dealer from whom he had got the books was also sentenced to the galleys. His wife was put in the prison of La Salpetrière. All three were put in the pillory, whipped, and branded.

Everybody can appreciate the danger Voltaire ran when he published his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. In 1769 his *Histoire du Parlement* was sold the publisher for six louis d'ors. The booksellers had been punished so severely that none dared to sell even a purely historic work.

And it was not in Paris only that his books were burned. *Doctor Akakia* was burned in Berlin, the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* in Geneva.

He lived under the threat of imprisonment to the end of his life. Diderot wrote to his friend, Mademoiselle Volland:

"You will hardly guess for what contemptible reason imprisonment threatens him. It is because of a deep grudge which our good masters have against him for an article in the *Dictionnaire*. . . . They will never forgive Voltaire—I fear these people intend, in spite of all the fame he enjoys, in spite of all his powerful protection, in spite of all his rare talents and fine works, to play a sorry trick on our poor patriarch. Do you know that three days ago it was resolved to put him in prison?"

For a year after Voltaire's death newspapers and periodicals were forbidden to write about him.

One has to bear these facts in mind in order to understand occasional actions on his part that otherwise might seem cowardly. It is hard for us to realize that the greatest men, those considered the purest and most pious, were frequently driven to evasions far worse than any Voltaire ever practised, he who finally revolutionized these conditions and the whole century.

All the best French writers denied the authorship of their works, as he did. Not only the writers on secular matters like Rabelais, La Rochefoucauld, and Pierre Bayle, but also religious writers, like the leaders of Port-Royal, and Saint-Cyran, who would

not admit the authorship of *Petrus Aurelius*, and even Pascal, who stooped to dissembling and used ambiguity to deny the authorship of *Les Provinciales*.

In the same spirit Racine, in a letter to Madame de Maintenon, of March 4, 1698, denies that he is a Jansenist. He says that he is sorry to learn that people are representing him as such to the King. By this facile lie Racine succeeded in denying his Jansenist friends when they were in trouble. Compared to these tricks, Voltaire's anonymity and denials are no more than a parade which he knows is recognized as such and cannot deceive any one. They are a mask which he always carries around and with which he sometimes covers his ears and mouth, knowing perfectly well that his eyes betray him.

In that century in which the thinker had to fight for his liberty he was the only one who never lost his courage. He could have lived in Paris peacefully had he consented to be silent, but he would not be silent. In many years he was the only one who would not be silent. Copernicus is silent all his life. Galileo recants his doctrine. Descartes suppresses his essay on physics when he learns of the trial of Galileo. Fontenelle renounces history and criticism. Fréret is silenced by his stay in the Bastille. He is put in prison for his address *"Sur l'origine des Francs"* which he delivered at his inauguration in *l'Academie des inscriptions*. This decides him to forsake all work concerned with history. The Marquis de Mirabeau is cured of his ideas of reform after being exiled to Bignon. D'Alembert finally loses his courage, and remains deaf to the exhortations of his friends, not to drop the work on the encyclopedia.

Voltaire says what he thinks. His life is action. He does not write for the sake of writing or for honor or for money; he writes because of an inner impulse, and to produce action in others.

3

What did it profit Voltaire for the Margravine of Bayreuth to visit him in Colmar, to treat him with

the greatest cordiality and to make the greatest efforts to eradicate the impression of her brother's harsh behavior? His attitude toward Frederick could never again become one of friendship and confidence. What did it profit him that he frequently met Richelieu at Plombières, where the two friends, who according to Sénac de Meilhans had become very similar in gesture, in voice and in accent, plotted, that Richelieu should use his influence with Madame de Pompadour to smooth the path for Voltaire's return to Paris? Louis XV could not be made to relent.

The King of France never missed Voltaire for five minutes. The King of Prussia, on the other hand, missed him so keenly and felt so lonely after Voltaire and most other members of the Round Table had left, that his courtiers looked for a substitute. Finally they heard of a Chevalier Masson, captain in the Briqueville regiment, who was reputed to be an especially bright and original man. Frederick asked Louis XV for him. He came, dined several times at the King's table, but was so far from comparable to his predecessor and made so many little lapses from good form that the King, having promised him a pension, paid it for twenty years without seeing him again.

What Voltaire's position was in France, however, he learned best when he went to Lyons to see his old friend, the Cardinal de Tencin. The interview lasted scarcely a minute. The Cardinal told Voltaire that he was unable to invite him to supper, because Voltaire was in bad repute at Court. The poet got up and left. —Years passed before relations were renewed between them. This occurred when Voltaire, before the battle of Rossbach, tried through Tencin to bring about a friendly agreement between Frederick and Louis.

It was only a small sop to Voltaire's vanity that the people of Lyons gave him a tremendous ovation at the theater. He felt that France was not for him and he turned to Switzerland.

A few days after he had left Lyons, he arrived in Geneva. He lived for some time in the Château de Praugin near Lausanne, and he liked it so well that he began looking about for a residence.

He sent a letter to the state council in Geneva, asking its permission to live in the territory of the Republic. He explained that his health was poor and it was important for him to be near his physician, Tronchin. The decision of the council permitted the Sieur de Voltaire to reside in the Republic.

Near Geneva he found a wonderful summer residence. For 90,000 livres he bought the Saint-Jean estate. The place delighted him so much that he named it Les Délices. Promptly he threw himself into work he keenly enjoyed. He became bricklayer, carpenter, farmer and gardener, renovating and remodelling everything.

4

It is necessary to dwell for a moment upon the man whom Voltaire mentioned in his petition to the council as his physician. Voltaire had not only absolute confidence in his efficiency, but also great admiration and friendship for him. As far as can be judged he never doubted but that this sympathy was returned. In this he was mistaken. In the numerous comments on Voltaire to be found in Tronchin's letters, one does not find a trace of goodwill, but much criticism and disapproval. This from religious prejudice.

Tronchin's never-ending outbursts of moralizing on Voltaire show that he was far from being a good psychologist. On the other hand, Voltaire exhibits little skill at judging character, for in a quarter of a century he never suspected how little Tronchin esteemed him.

This was the more unjust as the Genevese physician was indebted to Voltaire for a great part of his reputation. Voltaire says about him: "He is a man six feet tall, wise as Æskulapius and handsome as Apollo." But not all of Tronchin's attractiveness was in his looks: his wit and eloquence, says Voltaire, were unsurpassed. As a physician Tronchin seems to have taken due care of Voltaire's health. It was his aim to teach this big child more self-control, school

his temper to greater moderation—he might almost as well have undertaken to square a circle. His first letter to Jean Jacques Rousseau after the arrival of Voltaire, who at that time still was on good terms with his later enemy, shows an altogether wrong impression of Voltaire.

"What can be expected of a man who is almost constantly at war with himself, whose heart is always disappointed by his head! His moral condition has since his childhood been so unnatural, that his nature has become an artificial entity that finds kinship in nothing. Of all his contemporaries, he himself is the one whom he knows least. All his relations with other people are in disorder. He wanted to attain more happiness than he was entitled to expect. The exaggeration of his demand has led him imperceptibly into an injustice which is not condemned by laws but is disapproved of by reason. . . . The praises of his admirers have completed what his own immoderate demands had begun; he has become the slave of his adorers; his happiness depends upon them . . . hence, a libel by La Beaumelle angers him more than the applause of a whole theater could please him. And the result? The fear of death (for he trembles before it) does not stop him from complaining about life, and, not knowing whom to blame, he rails at fate, while he should be dissatisfied with himself alone."

Plainly, all the great qualities of Voltaire's character went over the head of this strict and upright Calvinist, who could see only his irritability over trifles and his sensitiveness to libels.

The main cause of all difficulties which disturbed the peace and quiet of Voltaire during his stay in Switzerland was his passion for the theater, his desire to write plays and to perform them in his house before a small circle of invited guests. And in this field Calvin's pious and virtuous herd would not yield.

Even before his arrival the theater had given cause for scandal. In 1748 a professor named Maurice had gathered several young ladies in a private house to play Corneille's tragedy *Polyeucte,* and the council

thereafter had ordered the pastors to warn private citizens that any dramatic performance whatsoever was forbidden. In 1752 fifteen barbers' assistants were called before the council and sharply rebuked because they had performed at the house of a tailor, Joubert, the tragedy *Cæsar's Death* by Voltaire.

Great excitement broke out in Geneva when Voltaire wrote *Le Désastre de Lisbonne*. Tronchin wrote about this to Jean Jacques, whose attacks upon Voltaire were precipitated by this poem:

"When he had written it I begged him to burn it. When I traveled to Paris, all our mutual friends jointly tried to persuade him to do so. But they only succeeded in having him soften some of his expressions; you can see the difference if you compare the second text with the first. . . . I hope, however, that he will read your letter about this attentively; if it has no effect it is due to the fact that at the age of sixty one is not cured of a disease which began when he was eighteen."

Tronchin did not understand that Voltaire did not wish to enter a controversy with Rousseau about the goodness of God. He did not consider that such a controversy would be for Rousseau a literary and social asset; for Voltaire it would mean the interruption of a dozen works which he always had in hand at the same time; and besides he knew such an argument would be entirely fruitless. What always annoyed him about any attack was the waste of time when he was forced to answer; whereas his antagonist was only too glad of the prestige that was attached to crossing swords with Voltaire.

5

Les Délices was a place to the poet's taste. He was not willing to leave to pay his respects to Maria Theresa in Vienna, when he was invited. "Happy is he," he writes to Thiriot, in the summer of 1756, "who lives in his own home with his own nieces, his own books, gardens, vineyards, horses, cows, his eagle, his fox and his rabbits that are tame enough to venture

right under one's nose! I have all of this, and in addition the Alps which have a wonderful scenic grandeur. I would rather quarrel with my gardener than pay court to kings."

He kept four coaches, a coachman, a postillion, two lackeys, a chamberlain, another servant, a French cook, a kitchen boy and a secretary. Lunch was always elaborate, and not a day passed on which a numerous company did not have lunch as his guests. Occasional poets came from Paris, such as the untruthful Palissot and the pleasant Patu, who in a letter to Garrick gave an enthusiastic description of his visit. Only in London had the young Patu been witness of such perfect hospitality.

From the moment when d'Alembert's article on Geneva was printed in the Encyclopedia, the citizens' joy at having Voltaire with them came to an end.

6

About this time a figure which we have so far met only casually takes a larger and larger share in Voltaire's life; he is accorded more and more admiration until he becomes a fellow-conspirator in the main aims of the great man. He has, like Voltaire, extensive knowledge, genius, and the gift of description. As a character he is less determined. He is Jean le Rond d'Alembert, the illegitimate child of Madame de Tencin and of an engineer, the brother of the poet Destouches. d'Alembert, twenty-three years younger than Voltaire, and Diderot represent the new generation, which continues Voltaire's work, a generation freer from prejudice than his own.

d'Alembert was a naturalist and an educational writer of high rank. He did not suffer from being illegitimate, although his youth had been hard. From the publication of his first work he was a made man. Foreign rulers like Frederick, and Catherine, sought friendship with him and enlightenment from him.

In Parisian society he was a brilliant light.

His long friendship with Mademoiselle de Lespinasse is mentioned by posterity as often as his scientific works.

Julie Jeanne de Lespinasse was begot in an adultery of Madame d'Albon, a prominent lady of Burgundy, whose legitimate daughter was married to a brother of Madame du Deffand. Once when Madame du Deffand was taking a journey through Burgundy she stopped at her brother's house and found this twenty year old girl leading a sad life, overburdened with household duties, and in a dependent position. Madame du Deffand, though very selfish, was one of the most brilliant women of France. She was captivated by the surprising intelligence of the young girl, and took her home. The family was afraid that Julie de Lespinasse would claim the name of d'Albon—to which she was entitled, as her nominal father was married to her mother—and with the name an inheritance. Madame du Deffand was not so considerate as not to stipulate conditions in this matter. She might have saved herself the trouble; for the young woman was as proud as d'Alembert. She had no more thought of laying claim to the name of d'Albon than he had of calling himself de Tencin. And each of them made the assumed name unforgettable.

After ten years of undisturbed life together, a break occurred between Madame du Deffand and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, because the former, who seldom arose before six in the afternoon, complained that her young companion liked to receive the notables who frequented the house an hour earlier, with the result that the first bloom of the entertainment had worn off when Madame du Deffand made her entrance.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse left the choleric lady's house. Her friends got together and rented her a suitable apartment, and Madame du Deffand was quite chagrined at the exodus from her salon to that of the rue de Belle-Chasse, where Mademoiselle de Lespinasse held court. d'Alembert and her influence upon him made her a focal point of society. Her modest house became the place where d'Alembert

met her other friends, Turgot, the Chevalier de Castellux, Cardinal Brienne, the Archbishop of Aix, Boisgelin, the Abbé de Boismont—the brightest men of the time.

All her contemporaries testify to her charm and popularity as a hostess, in spite of the fact that she could not invite anyone to a large dinner because of her humble circumstances.

The foremost salon of the time was that of Madame de Geoffrin. She was a very wealthy lady who kept up a generous program of philanthropy. Every week she gave two large dinners; one for artists: Vanloo, Vernet, Boucher, La Tour, Vien, Lagrenée, Soufflot, Lemoine; one for writers: d'Alembert, Mairan, Marivaux, Marmontel, Saint-Lambert, Raynal, Grimm. The only woman invited was Mademoiselle Lespinasse. All foreign notables wished an invitation to Madame Geoffrin's: the Swede Creutz, Galiani, Hume, Gibbon. She was motherly, understood the nature of each, gave them her guidance. To give and to forgive was her motto. She had no pretension to learning, and no passion. Without knowledge and without passion, she was soothing. Naturally a timid soul, she allowed no violent remarks to be passed at her table.

Obviously, in many respects it was out of the question for Mademoiselle Lespinasse to compete with Madame Geoffrin. But at her home, the camp of the encyclopedists, tempers were not under restraint; there were no restrictions on the freedom of speech, and she had the gift, at all times rare, of drawing detached conversations between individuals to a single subject, thus making the conversation general, so that everybody contributed his opinion to the same topic.

d'Alembert seems to have had an admiration and devotion for Julie de Lespinasse that is comparable to Voltaire's feeling for Madame du Châtelet. Once when d'Alembert was seriously ill, she sat every day at his bedside and nursed him. As he was then living with the honest glazier's widow who had nursed him in his babyhood, and as the physicians advised him to get plenty of fresh air, he moved in with Julie de

Lespinasse. Good society found nothing to object to in this.

But it is not the tender feelings this exquisite woman cherished for her great friend, that have put her name among the great lovers of the eighteenth century. It is the secret love which for five or six years she felt for the Marquis de Mora, a Spaniard, and even more her violent passion for Monsieur de Guibert. In 1809 her letters to him were published in two volumes. These letters have always, and justly, been considered one of the finest and most touching expressions of a passionate love. It is the passion of a fiery woman for a cool man whose attentions are divided among several women. It is the deep infatuation of a forty-year old woman for a thirty-year old man. It is the desire of a brilliantly talented woman for a man who has become the fashion, and who is inspired by his infallible luck with women to take delight in exciting desire.

He never kept a promise that he made. He disappointed the world as he disappointed her. She was consumed by a gnawing passion, of which d'Alembert had not even an idea, and he had to see her die, at the same age at which Emily du Châtelet died.

7

That colossal work, the *Encyclopedia,* the richest arsenal that eighteenth-century science built to combat superstition, was scarcely begun when its two keen and widely learned architects, d'Alembert and Diderot, began to suffer persecution. d'Alembert writes (August 25, 1752) to Voltaire: "This winter we have had to weather a heavy thunderstorm. I hope that at last we shall be able to work in peace. I thought it would be this way: after abusing us at first, they would come and ask us to continue the work. And in this I was not wrong. For a half year I said no. I bellowed like Ajax in Homer, and I can say that I gave in only to unusual pressure on the part of the public. I hope that our holding out so long will provide us a little more peace in the future." Voltaire

answered: "You and Diderot are engaged upon a work which will be France's glory, and the shame of those who have persecuted you. Paris is rich in penny-a-line hacks, but of eloquent philosophers I know only you and him."

Soon Voltaire himself became one of the most ardent collaborators on the *Encyclopedia,* and what is especially remarkable: he did so with a modesty which was never renounced; he always speaks as if he were carrying out the orders of his friends, points out that not his knowledge, nor his time, nor his health permitted him to make his articles as perfect as they should be to be worthy of such an undertaking. He sends material for them to use as they wish, field stones which they can hew as needed to fill in this or that breach in the wall. Again and again he insists that this is a case where personal vanity must not enter, that this is a matter of importance for the common good:

"As long as there is a breath of life in me I am at the disposal of the authors of the *Encyclopedia.* I shall always regard it as an honor to be permitted to contribute even though only modestly, to this, the grandest project that the French people and French literature have set for themselves." (December 9, 1755.)

He is not only a co-worker, but also gives guidance and criticism. He deplores the mediocre articles that now and then slip in. In his abhorrence of vagueness, discursiveness, long-windedness, superfluity, he insists that the articles should be kept short and pithy; first a clear definition of the term, then a concrete illustration.

The *Encyclopedia* was a mighty battering ram against superstition and fanaticism. But if it had avowed this as its purpose, its publication would have been promptly forbidden. So d'Alembert, Diderot and Voltaire had to accept articles of theological and metaphysical content that were in their opinion nothing but monks' talk, but which were useful as covers for other articles that contained the truth. When a Minister, like Malesherbes, was a little less intolerant, they had to make the most of it. When

judges and clergy, Parliament and bishops, were bickering among themselves, the philosophers could now and then seize the opportunity.

The misery in France was acute. The inhabitants in the country were so starved, that they literally tried to live like their animals, on grass. France's condition found its sharpest expression in the lack of bread.

Voltaire's letters on England had been the first attempt to draw attention to the causes of misery. Now the entire literature was affected by it. The rulers tried to pretend that a hallowed belief was being attacked. But it was not a question of the creed of the clergy. The question was one of the exemptions from taxation.

For all those who aimed at reform, the clergy was the stumbling block. Their power was due to their wealth. They owned one third of French soil. They resisted the Crown and the demands of the people. They were allied with the nobility whose members they numbered among their ranks. They formed a political machine which cloaked its worldliness with the reverence which it was able to command as an ecclesiastical organization. One thing, however, was clear: if the belief on which this reverence was founded were to be undermined a blow would have the force of an earthquake. The disclosure of the Bible as a human document and the breaking down of this document would inevitably bring about the downfall of the Church, and as the autocracy was based upon the Church, its downfall would only be a question of time. On July 23, 1760, Voltaire wrote to d'Alembert, "I wish that you would smash the infamy, that is the main thing. It ought to be reduced to the condition in which it is in England; and you can do it if you want to. It is the greatest service that can be rendered to mankind."

More than twenty years before Voltaire had, in a letter to President Hénault, spoken of the "low and infamous superstition." Then the term "the infamy" disappears from his letters and writings. When it reappears it is not in a letter by Voltaire, but in one of Frederick to him. The King, whose hatred of every-

thing ecclesiastical was more vigorous than Voltaire's, wrote on May 18, 1759:

"You will continue for a long time to hand down laws from your Parnassus at Les Délices, and you will continue at the same time to caress the infamy with one hand and scratch it with the other; you will treat it as you are used to treating me and the whole world."

Voltaire answered: "Your Majesty has reproached me in very fine verses with having occasionally caressed the infamy; good God! I don't do any such thing: I work only to wipe it out completely, and now and then I have been successful in the case of intelligent people."

At the end of 1757, Voltaire wrote to d'Alembert: "I do it like Cato. I conclude every speech with a *Delenda Carthago*. All that is needed to overthrow the colossus is five or six thinkers who can work in harmony. For it does not mean stopping our lackeys from hearing a Mass or sermon; it means emancipating the heads of families from the tyranny of their deceivers. This great mission already shows some progress. The vineyards of truth are cared for by men like d'Alembert, Diderot, Bolingbroke, Hume, etc. Had your King of Prussia (Voltaire no longer calls him "my King") devoted himself to this holy task instead of waging wars continuously, he could have lived happily, and all educated people in Europe would have blessed him."

There is no disparagement of the man of the lower class implied in Voltaire's phrase about the lackey. He had given ample evidence both in word and in deed of the wealth of sympathy he had for the common people. But he believed, as he often said, that those who had to make their living by manual labor could not possibly spare the time or strength to learn enough; that the thinkers should show them the way. And knowing the lack of intelligence of the farmers and laborers of France about the middle of the eighteenth century, one can understand why he did not feel that it would be of any value for some time to approach these classes with an anti-Christian propaganda. Even so, his confidence in the masses

grew. On September 28, 1768, he writes: "All over Europe one finds things to astonish one. A revolution of the human mind is taking place, which will have far-reaching consequences."

8

While Voltaire was thus sacrificing himself and his friends to the fight against tradition, which in his opinion was the basis of the infamy, the French Court was considering how it might make him a slave to this tradition. Madame de Pompadour, who was no longer young, and whose beauty had begun to fade with her youth, was looking about to add strength to her position. She knew only too well that nothing but habit tied the King to her. For a long time she had fought against her own cool nature, which could not meet the exacting demands of her master except by the aid of stimulants that were very dangerous to her health. Then she gave this up, and retained his favor by letting younger beauties, who could practice new caresses, but were not especially bright, succeed each other in the little house in the Parc-aux-Cerfs.

Her sole aim was now to secure a safe and honorable position at Court, like that of Madame de Maintenon under Louis XIV. She wanted to be made a lady of the Queen's palace. For this purpose she said and got others to say that every intimacy with the King had long ceased. In order to win ecclesiastical absolution of her sins, she added a pretended conversion, a new devotion. She even went to the Holy Father himself to attain her object.

Although the indignation of the Jesuits and the obstinacy of the Court of the Dauphin forced her to discontinue her exercises in the true Christianity with Père Sacy, she finally succeeded by pretending a desire to return to her husband, who was near death, in forcing the Queen to the humiliation of appointing her a lady of the palace. But while Madame de Pompadour was still attempting to insinuate herself into the Church, she tried to induce Voltaire to do the same. Why should not he be enlightened by the same

sunbeam of grace that had enlightened her? And what a triumph for the Marquise to lead the lost, oh, so far lost, sheep back into the fold of the Church!

At the instigation of Madame de Pompadour the Duke de la Vallière approached Voltaire with a proposition for the translation of the psalms of David. He would easily be able to surpass J. B. Rousseau as an ecclesiastical poet. He would give pleasure and instruction to his readers and the greatest joy to Madame de Pompadour. He would equal David, would enrich him. These psalms would be published in a wonderful edition at the printing shop of the Louvre.

Condorcet states that Voltaire was even promised a Cardinal's hat, if he would comply with these wishes —which was scarcely seriously intended. Voltaire makes no comment on the subject, beyond a hint in a letter to Thiriot that he had been asked to render the Old Testament into French verse. The most he ever actually did toward carrying out this suggestion was a free rendition of the *Song of Solomon.*

Madame de Pompadour had no scruples about making use of religion for her own ends. Voltaire was too proud for that.

All he wanted of the French Court was the privilege that other French citizens had, to come back to France and live in Paris. But this was denied him, and continued to be. d'Argenson's diary contains this entry: "July, 1756. The poet Voltaire has asked my brother to grant him permission to return to Paris for business purposes, and he has been refused." Surely, the Count d'Argenson had completely forgotten his school days' friendship with Voltaire. He was as cool to him as he was disagreeable to Madame de Pompadour. Finally she succeeded, after a scene of copious tears and a fainting fit, in turning the King against d'Argenson. Two days later the Minister received a *Lettre de cachet* which read:

"Your services are no longer required by me. I command you to hand in your resignation as Minister of War, together with all the prerogatives of the post, and to retire to your estate in Ormes."

The Count d'Argenson's disgrace wrung no tears

from Voltaire. But all the greater was his grief at the death of the Marquis d'Argenson, which occurred about this time. The Marquis had always been the nearer to Voltaire's heart, and he had many times proved himself a dependable friend. Posterity remembers him only for his famous retort in a matter concerning Voltaire: He had occasion once in his capacity as Minister to interrogate Desfontaines as to why he had written attacking his benefactor, Voltaire. "*Il faut que je vive,*" said Desfontaines; whereat d'Argenson replied with the words that became a saying in the French language—"*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité.*"

9

Les Délices was a place for the summer. Voltaire spent the winter in Monrion, near Lausanne, a city which he came to like much more than Geneva. Lausanne was more French than Swiss, the best society of the town consisting of French families who were expelled at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They retained their French habits and customs, their French politeness and charm. They welcomed Voltaire with the highest respect. They did not have the Huguenot prejudice against the theater. Ancient and modern plays were performed, comedies and tragedies by Voltaire, under his own direction.

In Lausanne Voltaire made the acquaintance of two ladies who were living together, the Countess of Nassau and Mademoiselle Rieu. He probably called because he had heard that Mademoiselle Rieu had a collection of fascinating letters, written by a remarkable woman. Mademoiselle Rieu was the granddaughter of Madame Calandrin, to whom Mademoiselle Aïssé had addressed these letters which are considered one of the greatest treasures of French eighteenth century literature.

Voltaire had known both Mademoiselle Aïssé and the Chevalier d'Aydie. Aside from that he must have been deeply moved to see that there lived, during those years of the Regency in France which were so rich in bestial passion and so poor in love, a young

woman capable of the strongest and tenderest love, a love as tender as that of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was violent.

The letters of these two women form the most remarkable love literature of the century. In the midst of an age in which sexual excesses were committed more and more cold-bloodedly, these two women like two priestesses guarded the sacred flame of love.

Without any question Aïssé is the more poetic. The story of her life is like an eastern fairy tale. Monsieur de Feriol, Louis XIV's ambassador at Constantinople, walking one day in the slave market, saw a little Circassian girl, four years of age, offered for sale. The Turks had found her in a prince's palace which they had plundered. Monsieur de Feriol sent her to his sister-in-law, Madame de Feriol, in France, to be kept for him until she should ripen into a suitable concubine for an orientalized French gentleman in his old age.

The young girl grew up. She was charming, with an appearance of almost child-like innocence, lovely features, and the grace of a gazelle. Her look was ravishing and at the same time naïve. Nobody knows whether or not she, who was able to defend her maidenhood against the amorous onslaughts of the Regent, was able to resist when, ten years after her arrival, de Feriol came home to exercise his pasha rights. But this much is certain, that from the first day she met the Chevalier d'Aydie, her whole nature surrendered itself to a single passion. And, strange to say, her chosen lover was worthy of her, loved her so deeply and sincerely that Madame de Feriol asked her one day if she had bewitched him. "The only witchcraft I have used," she answered, "is to love him and to do everything I know to make his life as sweet as possible."

Aydie offered again and again to marry her, but she steadfastly refused. "His glory is too dear to me," she said. At last she regarded it as a duty to break off her liaison with him. She writes: "To cut into an ardent passion is a terrible thing; it is like amputating living flesh. Death would be pleasant in compari-

son. I doubt whether I shall survive this." Her health wasted, her beauty faded. But the Chevalier remained devoted.

He was a sharp contrast to the men at whom the great ladies of the period were throwing themselves —Saint-Lambert, de Guibert, etc., who were miniature editions of that hero of fashion, Richelieu, the idol of three generations of women. But Richelieu was at least a man worthwhile. He dazzled because his presence of mind, his courage, his brilliant talent as a general made him irresistible. The others were vain and shallow.

Moreover, Aïssé, unlike Emily du Châtelet, did not belong to the French nobility, whose ladies never experienced shame, indeed scarcely knew the meaning of the term. Writing of the exaggerated playing of an actress in a love-part, she makes a revealing comment:

"It seems to me that for one who wishes to play the part of a woman in love, modesty and restraint are important requisites, regardless of how exciting the situation may be. Any passion must be expressed in the inflection and emphasis of the voice. Violent gestures with the arms should be left to men and witches. A young princess should have greater reserve."

Aïssé pictures Aydie's actions during her last illness: "He fancies he can keep me alive by his lavish generosity. He makes presents to the entire household, and even to the cow, to whom he gives hay. He gives one woman money to enable her son to become an artisan; he gives another something to buy herself a fur collar and some laces; he gives to anyone who comes to him here; it is almost a mania. When I ask him what is the use of all this, he says that it will make them all feel they must take even more care of me."

Voltaire left a monument to the Chevalier d'Aydie in the character of Coussi in his *Adelaide de Guesclin.*

10

About this time Voltaire launched upon a course to which he held steadily. He exerted himself to save the life of a man unjustly accused. I have spoken of Richelieu's victory over the English at Minorca in 1756. At the outset of the war, Voltaire had prophesied the deeds of his old friend in numerous publications.

The sensation this victory caused was all the greater because the British, convinced of their eternal superiority at sea, had poked fun at the French. They described the French naval forces thus: "The ferry-boats from Corbeil and Auxerre, the ferry-boats from Asnières, and the row-boats from Saint Cloud." In London there was public betting that Richelieu would be a prisoner in the Tower inside of four months. The English had never dreamed this thing was possible: an English Admiral take to his heels before a French fleet? Absurd! And curses and accusations came down upon Admiral Byng like hail. A court-martial was ordered.

Voltaire, who had met Admiral Byng during his stay in England, was stung by the rank injustice of making one man pay for the injured vanity of the English nation. He felt this the more keenly because he had heard, from Richelieu, how valiantly Byng had fought. So he turned to his friend and asked him to write out a report of the battle that could be sent to Byng for use as evidence in his defense. Richelieu's generous answer was promptly forthcoming:

"I am deeply grieved to learn of the charges against Admiral Byng. I can give assurance that everything I have seen or heard of him does great credit to his honor. As he did all that could reasonably be expected of him, he should not be criticized for having suffered a defeat. Every time that two rival commanders fight for victory, no matter how even their forces, one must be defeated. And this is all that can be said against Byng. His conduct was that of a capable seaman throughout the engagement, and I am amazed that he should have been brought to trial.

The two fleets were evenly matched: the English had thirteen vessels and we had twelve, but ours were better equipped and easier to manœuvre. The fortune of war, which determines the outcome of all battles, naval battles particularly, was more in our favor than in that of the enemy, since our fire did more damage than theirs. I am perfectly convinced, and so is everyone else who was present, that had the English stayed and fought it out their whole fleet would have been annihilated. Nothing could be more unjust than the action that is being taken against Admiral Byng. Every man of honor, every officer on either side, must follow this trial with the closest attention."

Voltaire forwarded the Marshal's letter to Byng with the following note:

"Monsieur, although I am almost unknown to you, I consider it my duty to send you the copy of a letter which I have just received from the Marshal de Richelieu. Honor, Humanity, and Justice compel me to place it in your hands. This noble and unsolicited testimony from one of the most upright and great-hearted of my countrymen makes me confident that your judges will be no less fair in dealing with you."

Richelieu's letter won only four votes for the defendant. He was sentenced to death and shot on March 14, 1757. He met his end with a stout heart. Before his death he sent Voltaire the brief he had presented for his defense, and he had his executor send him the following lines: "The late Admiral Byng wished to assure you of his respect, his gratitude and his esteem; he fully appreciated what you did, and died consoled by the justice that was done him by a noble soldier."

When we consider how little Byng must have meant to Voltaire, and that the poet acted on his own initiative, we can feel how strongly his sense of justice was outraged even by a remote and foreign instance of brutality. He would take any amount of trouble to alleviate the lot of any victim of misfortune or bullying, which arose from patriotic or from religious prejudice.

11

Voltaire became the greatest attraction in Switzerland. His home on Lake Geneva became a shrine for distinguished travelers from all over Europe. Hence a multitude of anecdotes remain from the quarter of a century he lived there; some from people whom he never mentions in his writings or letters, some from Europe's most prominent men and women.

Among the ladies who called upon him here was Madame d'Epinay, who is known for her kindness to Jean Jacques Rousseau and for her close relations to Grimm. She had come to Geneva to consult Tronchin, the physician. She wished Rousseau to accompany her on this journey, but had to be content with her husband's company.

Voltaire showed her every courtesy and put his coach at her disposal. He called her the "true philosopher among women," and his notes always complimented her on her big black eyes.

Louise Tardieu d'Esclavelles (in her memoirs "Emily") was born in 1725. At the age of twenty she was married to Monsieur d'Epinay, the eldest son of a tax-farmer, who treated her disgracefully. Diderot characterized this man as "One who went through two millions, without saying one good word or accomplishing one good deed."

She was small, slender, very well formed, youthful without immaturity. She was honest, vivid and bright. She had beautiful shoulders and curly hair. She defined herself thus: "I have courage, resolution and an overwhelming shyness. I am truthful without being frank."

Voltaire says: "She has discovered the great secret of making the best of her own natural endowment. I wish I could learn it from her, but my wrinkles tell me I am too old for that. She is an eagle in a muslin cage."

First she fell in love with a certain Franceuil; but he soon revealed himself as cold and vicious. Duclos, secretary of the French Academy, tried to replace

him with a mixture of tenderness and brutality, but she would not have him.

At the death of her sister-in-law, Madame de Jully, she was accused of having burned a number of compromising letters, and a paper which referred to a transaction between her husband and Jully. The German Baron Grimm undertook her defense. He was dependable and steady, a good observer of life, not quite a misanthrope, but certainly not the least bit inclined to overestimate people. Grimm was thirty-three years of age and she was two years younger when they met. Their relations lasted twenty-seven years, and during all this time his devotion never swerved.

Madame d'Epinay belonged to that circle of the encyclopedists in which it was not considered good form to let oneself be carried away by admiration. One should maintain the discerning critical viewpoint.

She knew besides that many women had gushed over Voltaire and that he had made fun of them when they left. She wanted him to feel that she was different. Reading her letters to Grimm, one sees that she finds nothing, or very little, to criticize in him. She jokes only about the fat, round niece, Madame Denis, who was already old and ugly and good-natured, and who entered into every discussion, without understanding anything about it. About Voltaire himself her tone is different:

"Again I spent a day with Voltaire. I was received with a politeness and attention which I believe I deserve, but to which I have not been accustomed. He asked me for news of you, of Diderot and of all of our friends. He made every effort to be pleasant. And he succeeded. It is not hard for him."

But as far as she could judge, she would rather spend her life with Diderot than with Voltaire. She did not consider that Diderot was appreciated at his full value in that house; whenever the encyclopedists were discussed, it was d'Alembert of whom one spoke.

Again she went to Les Délices to spend three or

four days there with her physician Tronchin. And she writes to Grimm:

"One has no time to do anything while staying at Voltaire's house. I am forced, dear friend, to close my letter. I spent the day alone with him and his niece, and now he is worn out from all the stories he has told me. When I asked him to let me write four lines to you, so you would not be nervous about my health, which by the way is good, he expressed the wish to remain to see what my black eyes say while I am writing. He is sitting opposite me now. He is poking at the coals in the fireplace, and laughing; he says that I am making a fool of him. I have answered that I am writing down everything he says, for that is at least as good as what I am thinking. I shall go back to town tonight, and shall then answer all of your letters. Here it is impossible to write anything."

12

Still more famous than Madame d'Epinay was another visitor, the great English historian Gibbon, then in the prime of his youth. As a boy of fifteen Gibbon had been converted to the Catholic religion, therefore his father sent him to Lausanne to come under Calvinistic influence. There he spent five years (1753-1758). In his *Memoirs* he wrote:

"Before I was called back from Switzerland I had the satisfaction of seeing the most extraordinary man of the time, a poet, historian, and philosopher, who had filled thirty quarto volumes with his productions in prose and verse, which were often excellent, and always entertaining. Is it necessary that I add the name Voltaire? . . . The greatest privilege I enjoyed from Voltaire's stay in Lausanne was the rare one of hearing a great poet recite his own works on the stage. He had gathered a company of ladies and gentlemen, some of whom were by no means without talent. A nice little theater was set up in Mon Repos, a square at the edge of a suburb, and costumes and scenery had been prepared at the expense of the actors. The rehearsals were directed by the author

with the fond care of a father. For two successive winters his tragedies *Zaïre, Alzire, Zulime,* and his sentimental comedy *L'Enfant prodigue* were played at the theater in Mon Repos. Voltaire himself played the rôles that were in keeping with his age, Lusignan, Alvarès, Benassar, Euphemon. His performance was in the style of the old theater, with pompous diction; it breathed enthusiasm for the poetry, but was somewhat lacking in naturalness."

13

There is one celebrity among the visitors, whom Voltaire never mentions, but who has written a most detailed account of his discussions with his hospitable host. This is Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, who devotes the ninth chapter of the fourth volume of his *Memoirs* to his conversations with Voltaire. Although some doubt must be cast upon the full dependability of Casanova's account, these reports seem to have been put down, as some say they were, immediately after they took place. Else some of the details mentioned would have been forgotten.

It is natural that the talk is mainly on Italian personalities and on Italian literature; but one clearly feels Casanova's aim is to show his superiority in every field that is treated. He often says provoking things to Voltaire which he was really scarcely impudent enough to say.

It is actually comic to see Casanova assigning himself the rôle of defender of religion against Voltaire. When Voltaire mentions his fight against superstition, Casanova says:

"You can, in my opinion, spare yourself the trouble of fighting a thing that you are powerless to destroy."

"What I cannot carry through, others will, and I shall still have the honor of having started it."

"That is very nice. But even supposing you did succeed in eradicating superstition, with what do you wish to replace it?"

"If I free the human race from a wild beast that is

devouring it, need anyone ask what I put in its place?"

"It is not devouring it. On the contrary, it is essential to its existence."

Voltaire points out that he wants to see the nations happy and free. But they cannot be free as long as superstition prevails. Casanova asks if he believes in the sovereignty of the people. No, a ruler is required to lead them. But he should not be a despot, he should guide a free nation. Thereupon Casanova replies that he agrees with Hobbes; the people must be enslaved, tamed, kept in chains. Let them keep the beast which they like so well. Casanova says that Voltaire reminds him of Don Quixote, who freed the galley slaves who as a reward attacked him, etc.

Now whether this remark, as seems likely, was inserted after the outbreak of the French Revolution, or not, the intention is perfectly clear: to picture Voltaire as the naïve liberal, who believes that the common sense of the people can be awakened and developed, while Casanova appears as the discerning student and despiser of *hoi-polloi,* who realizes that a Revolution will be the consequence of the free-thinking of the masses, and who believes in religion, between two orgies such as only his pen is fit to describe.

But to refute this idea, that Voltaire had not the slightest suspicion of the Revolution which was to take place only ten years after his death, here is a passage from a typical letter, which he wrote (on April 2, 1764) to the French Ambassador at Turin, his friend, the Marquis de Chauvelin, who with his wife had visited Casanova at his house:

"Everywhere I see the seeds of an inevitable revolution, which, however, I shall not live to enjoy. The French come late to everything; but finally they do come. Enlightenment has become so widespread that at the first opportunity everything is ready to explode. That will make a loud report. The young are fortunate; they shall see great things come to pass."

All that can truly be said is that Voltaire did not foresee the Reign of Terror.

In the course of the conversation the honorable

Casanova says characteristically that Chapelain's *La Pucelle,* which Voltaire took the liberty of calling a bad poem, at least does not make, like a certain other *Pucelle,* so wild a bid for popular applause as to offend all sense of shame and piety. And then, after giving his host the pleasant information that the Swiss writer Haller, whom Voltaire had criticized respectfully, does not return his French colleague's esteem, Casanova closes the conversation and takes his departure.

A little later Casanova becomes still more bitter, because Voltaire criticized his Italian translation of *L'Ecossaise* as very poorly done.

He concludes his account thus:

"I went my way, content in my foolish assumption that I had squeezed this athlete against the wall. Unfortunately there remained in my system a residue of ill-humor, which forced me for full ten years to deprecate everything that flowed from his immortal pen. Now I feel remorse for it, even though on going through my critical notes I find that I was often right. I should have kept silent, respected him and doubted the correctness of my own judgment. I should have considered that had it not been for his teasing, for which I hated him on the third day, I should have found him sublime in every respect. . . . Posterity will read what I have written and will count me among the number of his detractors, perhaps disregarding the apology I am giving to this great man. When we meet after death in the realm of Pluto . . . he will be my friend, I his honest admirer."

14

The Elector of the Palatinate had promised to pay Voltaire and his niece a considerable annuity during their lives. The Elector kept his promise. He and the other neighboring German princes were most obliging and hospitable to Voltaire. On his way to see the Elector, Voltaire stopped for some time with the Margrave of Baden-Durlach, in Karlsruhe. This visit is of interest to us because, according to a tradition,

Voltaire began here to write *Candide,* and read the chapters to the Elector as he finished them.

For a long time Voltaire had signed his letters jokingly: "Voltaire, the Swiss." Every year that passed had made him more and more a Swiss and more and more a farmer.

He bought a house in Lausanne with fifteen windows in the front. From his bed he could overlook Lake Geneva and all of Savoy that is not hidden by the Alps. Below his garden lay hundreds of other gardens. On this border of Savoy, across the Lake with its beautiful reflections of the gardens, the Alps rise in the form of an amphitheater. With this natural grandeur before his eyes he did not miss Potsdam. And his country place, Les Délices, he liked in summer as much as the house in Lausanne in winter.

But soon he acquired greater holdings, not because of any greed for land, but in the interest of his safety.

As soon as he had resolved to settle near the Lake for the rest of his days, he had to draw his conclusions from the experiences he had already been through. For it did not take him long to discover that there was a clergy in Geneva as well as elsewhere, and that it was no easier to keep on good terms with Protestant pastors than with Catholic priests. Here as in France he had to cope with all sorts of persecution from the authorities. He burrowed himself in like a fox—with many dens, and many exits from every den.

He was a Swiss through and through; but he purchased the estate of Ferney on the other side of the border, and at the first clash with the gentlemen in Geneva he could be in France, where he was a Frenchman, through and through, and they could do him no harm. However, should the French Ministry get one of those frequent, unpleasant fits of curiosity to learn who the author of this or that pamphlet might be, he could promptly be back on Swiss territory at Les Délices. And as nothing is so convenient and nothing is so respected as power, it was the natural thing to make many Swiss his vassals.

By purchasing President de Brosses's estate of Tournay, situated between the French border and

Geneva, he got the property with all seignorial rights and privileges attached. Tournay was a county, and there are some letters in existence signed by Voltaire as Comte de Tournay, this to the greatest amusement of Frederick, who so addresses him in various letters. Voltaire stated very clearly in one of his letters to Tronchin how great a pleasure it was to make men his vassals, who had begun to disturb his peace.

There were not many seignorial rights directly connected with Ferney, but by the kindness of the French Ministry he acquired privileges for Ferney, which corresponded to the rights which he acquired by the purchase of Tournay. Tournay was neglected, but extensive, and Voltaire wanted to cultivate it. His two properties reached almost to Les Délices, so that he had assembled "a little kingdom within a republic."

He writes gaily (on December 24, 1758) to Thiriot: "You are mistaken, old friend, if you think that I have here only two legs. I am a quadruped. I have one leg in Lausanne, in a very nice winter house, and one leg in Les Délices near Geneva, where the best people come to visit me. These two are the forelegs. The hindlegs stand in Ferney and in Tournay, which I have purchased from President de Brosses."

The contract for the purchase of Ferney had not even been signed, when he was defending his future vassals against a priest who had stated that he "would persecute them to the utmost," and he was seeing to the repair of the roads. Everything, great and little, became the object of his care. His stables in Les Délices lacked a stallion, and he wrote to the Marquis de Voyer, Keeper of the Royal Stables, to get an excellent stallion for his stud. He also obtained all sorts of favors by getting Madame de Pompadour to drop a word to the Prime Minister, the Duke of Choiseul.

In his letters during his eternal wars Frederick calls himself "the Don Quixote of the North," while Voltaire calls himself "the Old Man of the Mountain," like the leader of the Assassins, but "with better conscience, as he had not murdered anybody."

He discovered that of all the different forms of happiness, independence is the most worth striving for.

VI

POETRY AND SATIRE

1

During the reaction of Romanticism against Classicism and during the transformation of the language, which took place through the efforts of Victor Hugo and Theophile Gautier, Voltaire as a poet was forgotten. He lost standing in his country, as he had been shamefully overlooked in Germany because of the attacks of Lessing and the disparagement of the German Romanticists. But from the very first there was one among the French Romanticists, the only great critical talent, Sainte-Beuve, who gave Voltaire his due as a lyric poet.

After showing that the odes of Jean Baptist Rousseau, though perfect, were cold and that he had exerted no influence, Sainte-Beuve said: "The contrary is the case with Voltaire, the only true, the only great lyric poet of the eighteenth century. His imagination is always awake. One can find the poet in every fragment that came from his pen: trifles, satires, introductions to poetic works, impromptu lines which circle the globe. In his conversation he is a poet, by the brilliant flashes of his wit, the continuous lightning of his words, the lively and charming twist he gives each of his remarks."

In any period there are only a few who are able to raise themselves above their contemporaries' narrow conceptions of poetry, and who appreciate the fact that people's ideas of poetry change. These will rely upon their own judgment, and without any consideration of fashion will approve that which they feel to be good. The critic who amounts to more than a weather vane of literary fashion will esteem Voltaire as a lyric poet.

2

His prose is today far better appreciated than his poetry; that is why I have quoted so many of his verses.

His prose is read and appreciated in his short novels only. Unfortunately considerable knowledge of history is essential to the understanding of these productions one and a half centuries old.

For a proper appreciation of this prose, one should read one or two of the *Facéties*. Here his art is still better, his mental superiority still more striking, even for one who comes to them without any preliminary study.

We have seen how long Voltaire, who had been educated by the Jesuits, tried to show his gratitude. In 1748 he wrote to Père Vionnet: "I have fought for a long time under the banner of your society. You scarcely have a more insignificant soldier, but not one more devoted"—strong words. In spite of his fundamental difference of outlook he showed the Jesuits an almost childish respect, and had they responded with equal consideration everything would have gone smoothly. But there were belligerent Jesuits. Their chief publication attacked him again and again, until the editor, Father Berthier, incited Voltaire to a reply which in spite of its sting has charming gaiety and irresistible wit.

The title is: *Report of the Jesuit Berthier's Illness, Confession, Death and Revelation Including the Report on the Journey of Brother Garassie, and everything that Followed and Will Follow.*

This joke was perpetrated in November, 1759, and the man whose death is described so vividly lived twenty-three years longer. Father Berthier had just returned to Bourges and had been granted a pension. His journal was a Church paper and its purpose was to attack freethinking and freethinkers, Voltaire in particular.

The story runs thus:

"On October 12, 1759, Brother Berthier set out on this unhappy journey from Paris to Versailles, with

Brother Coutu who usually accompanied him. Berthier had put several numbers of *Le Journal de Trevoux* in the coach, which he wished to give to his protectors and protectresses, the chambermaid of Madame Nourrice, a royal cook, one of the pharmacy boys of the King, and several other gentlemen in high positions, who could appreciate real talent. Several times on the way Berthier felt ill; his head grew heavy; he had to yawn.—'I don't know what is wrong with me,' he said to Coutu; 'In all my life I never yawned so much.'—'Reverend Father,' said Coutu, 'that will pass away.'—'What? What do you mean by your "pass away"?'—'I mean,' said Brother Coutu, 'that I too am yawning, and I don't know why, for, I have read nothing all day nor have you spoken to me since we set out.'—While Brother Coutu spoke these words he yawned more than before. Berthier answered that this yawning apparently would never end.—The coachman turned around, and when he saw the two clerical gentlemen yawning, he yawned with them. The malady affected the people passing by. Everybody in the houses nearby was yawning. Such a great influence has a scholar sometimes by mere proximity."

After several chills both travelers fall asleep, in a deep, deathlike sleep from which they have not yet waked when the coach stops at the gate of Versailles. The coachman tries to wake them and get them out of the coach, but in vain. He calls for aid. Coutu, who is more robust, shows some signs of life, but Berthier remains cold. Several royal physicians coming from lunch, either pass by without looking at the patients or else give absurd explanations of their condition. Finally, a famous physician, who had studied under Boerhave, opens the patient's mouth, notices his bad breath, and decides that he is poisoned, and this with one of the most virulent poisons. The coachman is asked if by chance he has a package of drugs for the pharmacist in Versailles.—"No," he answers, "the only package I have for the Reverend Father is this." —He looks in the basket of the coach and brings out two dozen numbers of *Le Journal de Trevoux*.— "There you are, gentlemen, was I wrong?" asks the

great physician, and all those present admire his astonishing penetration.

Now everybody understands the cause of the illness. On the spot, the dangerous package is burned, and this brings Berthier around a little; but his head is affected and the danger is not yet over. The physician gets an inspiration to make him drink a page of the *Encyclopedia* dissolved in white wine, whereupon a great amount of gall is got rid of. But as his condition grows worse, it is necessary to call a father confessor. The first priest who is approached for this purpose refuses to take the responsibility for a Jesuit soul, the second agrees with the first. The dying man is asked if he has loved God and his neighbor.—"I love God," he answers, "and my neighbor as far as I can."

"Have you not read bad books?" asks the father-confessor. "I don't mean just boring books, like so and so," here follow the names of a dozen books by authors whom Voltaire wants to hit, "but I mean so and so," a number of theological writings are enumerated, among which are books of the old Jesuit Sanchez whom Pascal had attacked some time previously.

Berthier states that his position allows him to read everything; he is the editor of *Le Journal de Trevoux.* "What, you publish this paper which judges and rends all good writers? Don't you know that whoso calls his brother a fool is in danger of Hell fire? Yet you tempt honest people who happen to read your writings to call you a fool! You who so complacently criticize everything you do not understand. Two vices have you in their grip, haughtiness and greed. I cannot absolve you from your sins unless you swear not to work any more for *Le Journal de Trevoux.*"

When Berthier refuses, the priest declines to absolve him from his sins. Just then Brother Coutu comes running and calls, perspiring and stinking: "For God's sake, don't take the Sacrament from his hand! Do you know who he is? The editor of *Les Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques* (the rival Church paper). You are lost if you confess to him."

Astonishment, shame and anger bring back life to

the dying man for a moment. "Scoundrel," he exclaims, "opponent of God, of Kings, of the Jesuits! So you fancy you are less of a fanatic than I! Granted that I have written against enlightened men who have not lowered themselves to answer and to destroy me! Haven't you been just as arrogant? Don't we have to admit that in this century, the sewer of all centuries, we are the two most miserable of all insects that buzz around the dung-heap?"

The power of truth forced Father Berthier to speak thus in his hour of death. He spoke as one inspired. But soon the moment of death came; he pressed the hand of Brother Coutu, who said, "O Reverend Father, you are a saint, you are the first writer in the world to confess that he was boring. May you die in peace!"

The next chapter, *Brother Berthier's Ghost Reveals Itself to Brother Garassise,* begins thus:

"When I, Brother Ignaz Garassise, woke October 14th, at two o'clock in the morning, a ghost was there. It was Brother Berthier. I was seized by the longest and most terrible fit of yawning I ever knew. —'You are dead, Reverend Father?' I said.—Yawning, he made a sign to me which meant; yes!—'All the better,' I said, 'for, doubtless Your Reverence is accepted among the Saints. You must have one of the first places. Speak, Reverend Father, yawn no more but tell me.'"

The deceased now informs him that he is mistaken; Paradise is closed to him. And Garassise must refrain from slander in his future contributions to the *Journal de Trevoux,* for that is not forgiven in Heaven. Above all he must take care not to be boring, as Berthier was, for tedium is regarded as the unpardonable sin. Berthier, it seems did not go to Hell but to Purgatory. There he is to remain for 333 333 years, three months, three weeks, three days; and he is not to be discharged until a Brother is found who is devoted, peaceful, and unworldly, and who slanders nobody to reigning princes.

The last chapter treats of Brother Garassise's arrival in Paris from Lisbon in the year 1760; he gets into the convention of the Brothers who have gath-

ered in order to determine who is to take over the *Journal de Trevoux* after Berthier. Among others Fréron gives himself the highest recommendation: "My Reverend Fathers," he says, "I have been a Jesuit; you expelled me; but I belong to you; for, as Horace says: The barrel retains for a long time the smell of that which was in it. I am fit for the task. I am more ignorant, more impudent, and more of a liar than any other. Give me a lease of the *Journal de Trevoux* and I shall pay you as I can."

There is, however, no inclination to take the bread away from the children of the house and give it to the dogs, as the Bible says, and Brother Garassise claims his rights:

"I was chosen by Berthier himself, who, yawning, consecrated me as a journalist. I worked with the *Journal de Trevoux* until at your order I had to embark for Paraguay. I possess the pen of Berthier, the tedium of Catrou, the cantankerousness of Porée and the dryness of Daniel. I therefore ask for the prize that is due my merits."

And the Journal was given to him unanimously.

3

A striking passage in *Micromégas* pictures the inhabitants of Sirius and Saturn observing a battle on the Earth. The way in which the inhabitant of Sirius criticizes war, the anger and pity of the Giant over its stupidity, make a deep impression:

"Can one understand such madness? I feel like taking three steps and crushing this ridiculous, murderous heap of ants under my feet." "It's not worth the trouble," answers the inhabitant of Saturn; "they are working hard enough at their own destruction. Ten years from now not one per cent of these poor wretches will be left. If they do not slay each other, then hunger, or debauchery will finish all of them. Besides, these are not the ones who should be punished, but those barbarians who sit calmly in their warm rooms, comfortably digesting, and order a mil-

lion people to wholesale murder, and then go ceremoniously to thank God in the churches."

Voltaire's hatred of war never abated, not even in his obligatory odes in honor of war heroes. He told Frederick the Great just what he thought of the conquest of Silesia: "I wish you would be so kind as to tell me the truth: Are you any happier now than when you were in Rheinsberg?" (March 25, 1741). And in almost the same words (April, 1742): "I do not know if you are now, in all this noise of fame, any happier than you were in Rheinsberg in quiet seclusion." He speaks very freely in his letter of May 26, 1742, in which he says: "I think of the human race, Sire, before I think of you; I shed tears, like Abbé Saint-Pierre, for the human race, whose terror you are becoming, and only thereafter can I rejoice in your glory." In the same letter he expresses the same thought in verse:

J'aime peu les héros; ils font trop de fracas;
Je hais ces conquérants, fiers ennemis d'eux-mêmes
Qui dans les horreurs des combats
Ont placé le bonheur suprême,
Cherchant partout la mort et la fesant souffrir
A cent mille hommes, leurs semblables.
Plus leur gloire a d'éclat, plus ils sont haïssables.
O ciel, que je dois vous haïr!
Je vous aime pourtant malgré tout ce carnage.

Seventeen years later in a letter to Frederick he says: "Believe me, Sire, I was made for you, and I am ashamed of being happier than you; for I live with philosophers, while you have only first class murderers in uniform around you. Move to Sans-Souci, Sire, to Sans-Souci!"

Let us add Voltaire's biting description of the storming of a besieged city, and its capture. He describes the courage, but also the horrors of battle.

Je n'ai cessé de voir ces voleurs de nuit
Qui, dans un chemin creux, sans tambour et sans bruit,
Discrètement armés de sabres et d'échelles,
Assassinent d'abord cinq ou six centinelles;
Puis, montant lestement aux murs de la cité,
Où les pauvres bourgeois dormaient en sûreté,
Portent dans leur logis le fer avec les flammes,
Poignardent les maris, déshonorent les femmes,
Ecrasent les enfants, et, las de tant d'efforts

Boivent le vin d'autrui sur des monceaux de morts.
Le lendemain matin on les mène à l'église
Rendre grâce au bon Dieu de leur noble entreprise;
Lui chanter en latin qu'il est leur digne appui;
Que dans la ville en feu l'on n'eût rien fait sans lui;
Qu'on ne peut ni voler, ni massacrer son monde,
Ni brûler les cités, si Dieu ne nous seconde.

4

In *Candide* Voltaire treats a broad question: Is our world really, as Leibnitz believes and Pope stated, the best of all possible worlds?

The distaste for metaphysical debate which Voltaire expresses in *Candide* is his reply to Pope's "everything is well" and Leibnitz' "everything is for the best." He answers, not with suppositions, but with facts: Slavery and syphilis, thirty thousand dead in the Lisbon earthquake, ten times as many dead and countless injured in the Seven Years War, the smoke and flames of the stake.

Candide meets a negro who has been horribly disfigured by a barbarous master and he says: "O Pangloss, you did not foresee this horror. It's all I need to see. I must renounce your optimism."—"What is optimism," asks Cacambo.—O, said Candide, "that is the insanity which insists that all is well when everything is going wrong."

Had one, after the earthquake of Lisbon, called to the unfortunate survivors that lay mangled beneath the ruins: "Everything is all right, the necessary effect of inevitable causes; your misfortune means nothing, it is all for the greatest good of the greatest number."—it would have sounded like a cruel attempt to be witty. Everything is all right? For whom? Obviously not for us. For some God? It is clear that this God does not suffer from our misfortune. What consolation do these phrases bring? What use is it to tell the slandered, to tell the persecuted, to tell those who stand bound to the stake waiting for the flames to reach them, that everything is well, that nothing better can be expected from a fate that embraces the whole universe in its love?

Voltaire was naturally inclined to enjoy life. Every-

thing gave him pleasure from a good meal, a good bed, a merry conversation, up to the sight of a lovely woman or the effect of a fine poem. He enjoyed being a poet, historian, physicist, architect, upholsterer, gardener, wine-grower, combatter of errors, fighter against folly and superstition. Comparing his epoch with the past, he felt with satisfaction that progress had been made.

But about the middle of the century his joy in life decreased. Too many horrible events occurred in the world at large and in his own private life. Lisbon's catastrophe gave the signal for every sort of public calamity. The fires of religious persecution again flamed up. The Seven Years War drowned in blood all hope of peaceful progress.

Fresh news nearly always means fresh misfortunes. After one has lived for some time, all illusions are gone. Fate hurls us along, toying with us. Let us try, let us try . . . what a word! Nothing depends upon us, we cannot decide anything, we are puppets, ruled forces.

5

From this mood came *Candide,* and as the book had been so thoroughly prepared, its elaboration required but a few weeks. Toward the end he became so keen to finish that he locked himself in for three days and refused to open the door, except to have his meals and his coffee brought.

On the fourth day his worried niece forced him to let her enter. He tossed her the completed manuscript and said: "Here, curious Madame, is something you may read."

Even though *Candide* mocks at optimism on every page, is it fair to say that it preaches pessimism? Not at all. One system is as much detested by Voltaire as the other. He knows there are good people and beneficent people, and he does not try to hide it. With his restless inclination to work, his insuperable belief in human progress, he is by no means inclined to see everything black. He himself is well off; but he gets no pleasure, as Lucretius expressed it, from watching

the fierce storm from a safe harbor. His *joie de vivre* is depressed by sympathy and fellow-feeling for the suffering of others.

Read carefully the end of the story: outside of Constantinople Candide and his companions meet a good old man who is enjoying the fresh air in front of his door under an arbor of orange trees. They ask him the name of a Mufti who had recently been murdered in the city. He knows nothing about the case, but invites the travelers into his house and prepares a choice meal for them. His hospitality is lordly. He possesses a few acres of land which he cultivates with the help of his children. The work keeps them free of three great evils: ennui, sin, and poverty.

This makes a deep impression on Candide. Pangloss says that man is not made for rest, and Martin admits that there is one way to make life bearable: to work without brooding too much. The entire little company is converted to this view. And everyone turns out to be good for something. Even Brother Giroflée becomes a good worker, still more, a good fellow. And when Pangloss wishes to resume his long discourse about how man was perfect before the fall, and that all events are for the best in the best of all possible worlds, Candide interrupts him with the words: "Well said, but we must attend to our garden."

This which cannot be called an expression of cynicism, or of despair, or of pessimism, or of surrender, is Voltaire's own final motto. It is the consolation he holds out to the human race.

Feeling independent and safe through his ownership of several estates, Voltaire did not hesitate, this time, to publish his work. His friends recognized his style, but as usual he promptly disclaimed authorship of the book whose title page read: *Translated from the German by Dr. Ralph.* He wrote to his acquaintance, the Genevese pastor Jacob Vernes: "I have finally got around to reading *Candide,* and, as with *Jeanne d'Arc,* I tell you that anyone must be out of his senses to ascribe such stuff to me." Even to his own publishers, the Brothers Cramer, he wrote carefully: "What sort of work is this *Candide,* of which it

is said that it is scandal to sell it, and which is supposed to have originated in Lyons? I might like to have it. Couldn't you, gentlemen, get me a bound copy? It is said that some people are brazen enough to claim that I am the author of this work, which I have never laid eyes on."

In spite of this little farce, agreed upon in advance with the publishers, they succeeded in smuggling a considerable number of copies into Geneva.

In March, 1759, *Candide* was denounced to the Council, who ordered that it should be burned by the hangman at once. This was done, to Voltaire's anger. He took revenge shortly by flooding Geneva with brief anti-Church and anti-Christian pamphlets. The authorities of Paris as well as of Geneva were furious. The encyclopedists had almost got the best of them. The clergy urged that some decisive action should be taken. Helvetius's book *De l'Esprit,* which had caused a considerable sensation, was condemned by the Parliament and burned by the hangman on February 10, 1759.

VII

FERNEY

1

Several times in his letters Voltaire mentions a significant circumstance: he was continually being visited by men who bore names that were familiar and dear to him; but they were not the ones whose pictures he had associated with these names. These were the children of the men he had known, and sometimes they were as old as he remembered their fathers to have been. His earlier environment receded with the passing of time.

Voltaire had been in his earlier years a dear friend of the Marshal de Villars and his wife. One day there came the Marshal's son, the Duke de Villars, Governor of Provence, who led a life of princely splendor at Aix. In 1760, when he visited Voltaire he was fifty-eight years old, conducted himself in every respect like a grand seigneur, but was used up by vice and dissipation. He cherished a passion for the theater. In his youth he had played in the comedies given in his parents' home. He was of the opinion that very few knew how to recite verses as well as himself. Without hesitation he undertook at Voltaire's house to play the rôle of Genghis Khan in *l'Orphelin de la Chine,* opposite Madame de Denis. The performances took place behind closed doors, as he feared to injure his dignity as governor of a province.

After him came the young and winning Chevalier de Boufflers, the twenty-six-year-old son of the pleasant Marquise, who had been the center of the Court of the Polish King in Luneville. He was a prankish young blade, with many little talents. He wrote neat verses in which he now assured his pretty mother that she stood above other women as a Seraph above angels, then teased this admired mother on her inflammability, then again all ladies about that strange,

incomprehensible thing which they called the heart, but which he, hearing of its longing and needs, satisfactions and joys, was inclined to call by a different name. In Switzerland, to be able to study the country, he passed himself off as a poor French painter who lived by his art.

Since his youth the Chevalier had looked forward to meeting Voltaire. So he introduced himself at Ferney and was received as his mother's son, and made to feel at home in the home of an old friend of the Marquise de Boufflers. He stayed for several months. He was delighted with the place and its proprietor, enjoyed the society of the pretty, witty, young Madame Cramer who was about his own age and the wife of Voltaire's printer and publisher. He writes:

"You have no idea of the lavish way in which Voltaire spends and gives away his money. He is King and Lord of the land he lives on; he brings happiness to his neighborhood, and is as good a patriarch as he is a poet. If he were to be divided and I were to see on one side the man whom I read, and on the other the one whom I know in daily life, I would not know which to choose. His publishers may do whatever they wish, he is and remains himself, the best edition of his books. The house is delightful, the location excellent, the food choice, and my rooms magnificent."

No visit could have given Voltaire a more overwhelming idea of the passing of years and the shifting of contemporary figures than that of young Count de Lauraguais, a somewhat eccentric, but brilliant poet, who called at Ferney in September, 1761, to dedicate his tragedy *Clytemnestre* to Voltaire. He introduced himself as the grandchild of the merry Duchess de Lauraguais, upon whom not so very long ago Louis XV had bestowed his favor.

The Count de Lauraguais wrote poetry, good poetry. He was the lover of the opera star Sophie Arnould. It was he who was responsible for freeing the French theater from the practice of allowing spectators to crowd the stage and hinder the free movement of the actor. With 30,000 livres he compensated the actors for the loss of revenue.

Lauraguais had other good qualities; for instance, he supported poor but deserving writers. Voltaire makes frequent reference to the pension he gave to the famous encyclopedist, de Marsais, who was persecuted by the Bishop of Soissons.

Lauraguais described his arrival at the patriarch's house thus:

"He scarcely had embraced me with those arms, that in my childhood had often opened to me, and mentioned the correspondence with which he has honored me ever since we met in Berlin, then he led me through his château, gave me holy water at the entrance to his church and said: 'Now let's go down to the garden.' Noticing my astonishment at finding there a jackass enjoying itself on the green, he said: 'Don't you recognize Fréron?'—'Yes,' I answered, 'one might take exception to some points about the figure, but the likeness in the face is striking. I am surprised to find him with you; I did not think that you were on good terms with him.'—'His body,' was the reply, 'flourishes best in Paris but his face does better here.' As you see me here I am not quite the Voltaire whom my readers know. I often feel the need of a good fit of anger, and this face gives me just what I need."

2

The visit of his old friend, Richelieu, to Ferney could not fail to remind him of the flight of time. As soon as Richelieu's arrival was announced, Voltaire, in festive attire and accompanied by his household, went out to meet him. He, who had been expelled from Prussia, exiled from Paris, who had wandered about homeless, was glad to welcome the victor of Port Mahon, to be able to offer him princely hospitality as Lord of a little territory.

During the Marshal's stay the Duchess d'Enville, her son, the Count d'Harcourt, and the Duke de Villars, did not leave Ferney; nor did Cramer or other agreeable members of good Genevese society. Madame Ménage and Madame Cramer were both attrac-

tive ladies. The Marshal remained with Voltaire five days. The entire castle of Tournay had been turned over to him, and every evening he was escorted there by a great procession. Voltaire did everything his wit could devise to give a festive air to the Marshal's visit. And the latter had retained his youthful ability at making himself liked by the fair sex. One day Voltaire came upon him on his knees before Madame Ménage. Then suddenly he was seized with a passion for Madame Cramer. A complicated intrigue was set in motion to enable Richelieu to be alone with this Parisienne who had been driven out of Calvinistic Geneva. Her husband was sent into town to have a poetic epistle which Voltaire had written in honor of the Marshal, printed overnight, so it could be presented in the morning.

Richelieu had, however, not even bothered to get Madame Cramer's consent; so confident was he of his irresistible appeal, in spite of his sixty-six years. But when Philibert Cramer had gone to Geneva to remain overnight and Richelieu made advances to his pretty wife, she laughed in his face. His only consolation was to see the husband enter his bedroom in the morning with the freshly printed poem in his hand.

This defeat of Richelieu's, perhaps the first he ever suffered, could not but serve to remind Voltaire that the years had passed over both of them and left their mark even upon the ideal of ladies.

Our knowledge of this rebuff of the wanton seducer is Richelieu's own fault. He found the story so amusing that he told it in Paris to all of his friends.

3

A guest whom Voltaire saw for the first time and who had a great reputation was Prince Charles Joseph de Ligne, later a Field Marshal of Austria, "the favorite of all kings, courtier at all Courts, friend of all philosophers," as he was called by his contemporaries. He was then twenty-eight; but already his witty sallies and brilliant repartee were quoted every-

where. He was a charming conversationalist, Ségur narrates several anecdotes of conceits he devised and clever retorts he gave while accompanying Catharine II on her journey from Kief to Kersan. On board of the ship the Empress said referring to the uneasiness of the powers at this journey: "The Cabinet of St. Petersburg which is now on the Dniester 'must loom very large indeed' if the other cabinets are so concerned about it."—"Even so, Madame," answered Prince de Ligne, "I know of no other that is smaller. Its extent is only a few inches; it reaches from one of your temples to the other, and from the base of your nose to the roots of your hair."

He has left us a vivid description of Voltaire. First a minute picture of his style of dress: on week days, gray shoes, iron-gray stockings, a wide jacket of silk, a great wig and a little black velvet cap; on Sundays a neat reddish-brown coat, without ruffles, vest and trousers to match, or a jacket with wide tails, gold-trimmed with wavy braid and wide lace-cuffs which reached to the finger tips. Then a description of his person:

"He was now writer, now Courtier of Louis XIV's Court, then again gentleman of the best society. . . . The best thing I could do during my stay was, not to try to be entertaining or witty myself, but to induce him to talk. I was eight days at his house, and I wish I could recall the sublime, honest, beautiful things that escaped him one after another. But this is impossible. I laughed or I admired; but I was as though in a continual ecstasy. Everything about him, even his injustice, his mistakes, his hobbies, his lack of appreciation of the fine arts, his moods, his pretentions to being what he could not be, as well as what he really was—everything he did was delightful, new, charming and unexpected. He would like to be considered an excellent statesman and a great pedant, this last to such a degree that he would like to be boring. . . . He had a very high opinion of the English constitution. I recall saying to him: 'Monsieur de Voltaire, don't forget the power that maintains it: the ocean; without this the constitution would not stand.'"

In one of the letters young Boufflers sends his mother are the following lines on Voltaire: "You cannot imagine how pleasant he is in his home; he would be the best old man in the world were he not the greatest man alive; he has only the one fault of being inaccessible."

This was no fault, but with the years it became a more and more pressing necessity. Many visitors had to be content with a polite reception by his niece and depart without having seen the lord of the house. His health was really not good; but he used this as a pretext when he didn't want to see anybody. "My God, save me from my friends; I'll attend to my enemies myself," was one of his favorite outbursts. Sometimes he found it necessary to speak sharply to visitors who abused the hospitality extended them and who made themselves at home without ever mentioning their departure. To one such guest (Abbé Coyer) Voltaire said one day: "You, Monsieur l'Abbé, are a true counterpart to Don Quixote; he mistook inns for manors; you seem to mistake manors for inns."

It was most difficult to get rid of the English tourists who wanted to see him. Several who called on him one day were told that Voltaire was sick. But they wanted to see him even if sick. "Tell them that I am dead," said Voltaire.—They wanted to see the body.—Furiously he exclaimed: "Then tell them that the devil has taken me."

An Englishman emphasized that he had made the long journey in order to see Voltaire and that he would not depart without having seen him.—"Aha," said Voltaire, "he thinks I am a beast on exhibit. Tell him the show costs six pounds."—"Here are twelve pounds," said the Englishman, unruffled, "but I'll be back tomorrow."

4

Each passing day, Ferney became more and more a meeting place for the prominent men and women of Europe. Every day, Voltaire worked to spread

content around him. He had the Bishop of Annecy's permission to tear down the hideous old church at the entrance to the château of Ferney and to erect a new one at his own expense. He himself took charge of the work, the tearing down as well as the building.

He had a large wooden cross removed from the entrance to the cemetery, without asking the required permission. He is said to have told the laborers: "Oh, take that gallows away!"

The clergyman at Moens, who hated Voltaire, requested the one at Ferney to remove the sacrament to the church at Moens. He said that Voltaire had desecrated the Ferney church. The priest of Ferney obeyed and in a great procession, accompanied by the weeping members of the community he carried the sacrament to Moens.

Voltaire with his usual keenness approached the Pope himself, first through Cardinal Passionei, who died before an answer came, and then through the Duke de Choiseul, the French Foreign Minister. Voltaire sent the plan of his church to Rome and asked for relics. Benedict, was very courteous and sent the hair shirt of St. Francis of Assisi, "Voltaire's patron." The infidel François did not feel tempted to put it on, but was glad to have it to adorn his church.

As is well known he had the words *"Deo erexit Voltaire"* carved on the outer wall of the church. To the Englishman Richard Twiss who visited him he said: "This church which I have had erected is the only one that is consecrated to God alone; all the others are consecrated to male or female saints. I would rather build a church to the Lord than to His servants," and in a letter of October 26, 1761, he wrote: "I have built a church and a theater; I have already celebrated my Mysteries at the theater but as yet I have not heard a mass in my church. On one and the same day I received relics from the Pope, and a portrait from Madame de Pompadour."

VIII

THE WRITING OF HISTORY

1

The writers who, before Voltaire, wrote the history of France, were inspired by hope and fear; by the hope of receiving a pension from the royal purse, and by the fear of being put into the Bastille if they were to tell facts that the authorities did not wish to be mentioned or criticized. Voltaire's contemporary and a so-called friend, President Hénault, writes about those essays, that we consider so mild, dealing with princely personages in Voltaire's *Century of Louis XIV*: "Such things may be told confidentially in one's chimney corner, but one does not write them down." The President himself gave an example of caution when in his *Abrégé Chronologique* he criticized the massacre of St. Bartholomew, not in his own name, but in a quotation of the Archbishop Péréfixe.

We have seen in *Charles XII* how carefully and zealously Voltaire gathered information from eye witnesses. In the same way, he sought information and news of that century in France, which preceded his own, and he succeeded in creating a work which is of interest to the student of history even today.

He had spent his youth among the contemporaries and in the vicinity of Louis XIV, had known certain relatives of the King, such as the Duchess de Maine, and also his generals, such as Villars and Vendôme. Wherever he had stayed, in Le Temple, in Saint-Ange, in Sully, in Sceaux, in Vaux-Villars, in La Source, he had been surrounded by reminders of France's great century. His parents had been in close touch with leading men and wits. In England he had met still others who had taken part in the War of the Spanish Succession or had been witnesses of its events like Lord Peterborough, Lord Methuen, and the Duchess of Marlborough.

Before Voltaire historians did not care about the accuracy of what they told. Mézeray admits this frankly. The aim was to turn out entertaining reading matter. Some scholars like Rapin de Thoyras, the author of *England's History,* went to the sources; but these were exceptions. Rollin (1661-1741) author of a popular *History of Ancient Rome,* was undiscriminating. The Jesuit Père Daniel (1649-1728), who wrote a *History of France,* gained access to the eleven or twelve hundred volumes of documents and manuscripts in the Royal Library of Paris, spent an hour hurrying through them, and had enough. He said to Father Tournemine, the former teacher of Voltaire, that all these documents were "useless old paper he did not need in writing his history."

Voltaire, however, read everything that had appeared in the way of descriptions and memoirs, several hundred volumes, and then he extended his search to every place that he suspected notes could be found, to the Duchess of St. Pierre, whose brother, the Marquis de Torcy, had conducted the negotiations preceding the War of the Spanish Succession, to Cardinal Fleury, etc. He read the memoirs of Torcy, Dangeau, Villars, and was allowed to look through the papers of Louvois, of Colbert, and of his nephew, Desmarets de Meillevois. After the first edition the Duke de Noailles even sent him Louis XIV's personal papers, and he went over his work and corrected it accordingly. Indeed after every criticism that seemed to him well-founded, he made corrections.

No criticism was more ill-founded than President Hénault's statement, that Voltaire saw only the surface of things, that he had not the seriousness of the historian, that he belittled his native land and its great men. Hénault wrote on December 31, 1751, to Count d'Argenson: "Voltaire sent me his book. . . . I wish that his work were such that it could be admitted to France. The mistake in the first volume, a grave mistake, is that Louis XIV is not treated according to his deserts."

Compare with this the repeated statement of Voltaire's later attackers, that his history has little value because he made Louis XIV his idol and that he

liked the King for the same reason that Saint-Simon disliked him, namely, that people of the bourgeois caste came into power under him.

The comparison with Saint-Simon is only confusing. In the present day, when there is little appreciation of the history of ideas, while the curiosity for anecdotes of a scandalous nature is more keenly alive than ever before, it is natural that Saint-Simon's memoirs have a greater appeal than Voltaire's *Century of Louis XIV*.

One may recall that Voltaire and his contemporaries disapproved of the purely picturesque, the little details and anecdotes that did not illustrate an idea. The pale color of the *Century of Louis XIV* satisfied the eighteenth century so well that it was received with enthusiasm. Lord Chesterfield expressed the opinion of the best people by saying: "It is the history of the human mind, written by a genius, for the use of intelligent brains."

2

After a long pause in the elaboration of the work, Voltaire started in again on it in the year 1750. He published it in 1751 in Berlin, edited and revised it again in 1756; only in 1768 did he give it its final form. It is one of the most profound works he ever wrote.

In his *Charles XII* he did not curb his hatred of war. In the *Century of Louis XIV* he is inclined to be enthusiastic over victories and conquests. However his book is not primarily written to glorify the armies of France, but French civilization of the seventeenth century, its mental development, its masterpieces of literature and art, the spread of the French language over Europe. His intention was, also, to picture the Court in which Condé, Colbert and Racine were able to meet in contrast to the Court from which Voltaire was excluded.

He did not wish to write the history of the King, but, as the title expressly says, that of the century. He is the first historian of European culture. We have seen, in the letters to Frederick the Great, that he rated the man who gave joy to the human race

above the man who spreads death and destruction, the war hero. He writes: "You know that to me the great men are first, the war heroes last. I call those great men who have distinguished themselves by improving the condition or the pleasure of mankind. Those who plunder and devastate provinces are heroes only."

Voltaire in his description of men does not aim to rival the portrait painter; he never forgets his calling as a narrator. But how surely and vividly he pictures those he has seen himself! Take his description of the Maréchal de Villars.

There rose a man who seemed to give France new confidence in her destiny: the Maréchal, Duke de Villars, who later was commander-in-chief of the armies of France, Spain, and Sardinia and who, at the age of eighty-two, was still a keen, self-confident officer. By his stubborn insistence on doing more than his duty he made himself a great man. Occasionally he displeased Louis XIV and what was more dangerous, Louvois, because he answered them as sharply as he fought for them. He was reproached for not being as modest as he was brave; but at last we came to understand that he was a genius at war, and that he was born to command Frenchmen.

There is scarcely anybody who was more a victim of envy, or one who deserved it less. To be sure, he became Marshal of France, Duke and Peer, Governor of a Province; but he saved a State, and others who caused his misfortunes and who were only courtiers, received the same rewards. He was even reproached with his wealth which was nothing more than a comfortable competence, and which he had earned by levies in hostile territories that he had conquered. It was only his just reward, while those who had acquired in a shameless way fortunes ten times as great, kept them with approval from all sides. He could begin to enjoy his glory only when he was almost eighty and had outlived the entire Court.

What was at the bottom of this injustice?

One day when he said good-by to take command of the army, he said to the King before the entire Court: "Sire, I depart to combat Your Majesty's ene-

mies and leave you in the midst of mine." He said to the courtiers of the Regent, who had enriched themselves with Law: "I for my part have never gained anything, except victories over our enemies." Such remarks, bold as his deeds on the field, were too injurious to others who were already irritated by his success.

3

We have seen that Voltaire did not regard world history as that of kings, but as the history of civilization; he did not wish to write about wars and battles, but about man's customs, the development of commerce, the progress of literature and arts, as far as one can speak of progress in connection with them; at any rate he wished to discuss their golden ages, and draw attention to the best works.

But the main point is that he, in contrast to Bossuet, wanted to write the history of the whole globe, and not only of the Mediterranean nations. He knew that the Chinese, Babylonians, Indians, and Egyptians, had a history which antedated by far that of the little Hebrew nation, and was much older than the history of classical antiquity, although the scholars ignored everything except the Greeks and Romans.

All he had to do was to drink his favorite Arabian coffee from a Chinese porcelain cup, and he felt as if he were regarding the globe.

L'Essai sur les Mœurs is a prodigious work. It takes up four great volumes, or if, like Voltaire himself, one regards the books on *Louis Quatorze* and *Louis Quinze* as sequels, then it is seven volumes.

That such a work, embracing nearly nine centuries and all countries, is not the product of independent research on the part of the author, is self-evident. However, men, who, like Lanson have studied the work in relation to its sources, have found that Voltaire everywhere stuck to those writers who were in his time considered the best authorities: in writing on Mohammed, Gagnier and Sale; on China, de Halde; on ecclesiastical history and the crusades, Fleury; on the history of England, Rapin de Thoyras; but in every case where it was feasible, he got in-

formation from the documents, to which these writers referred him.

Voltaire confines himself to the study of the habits, clothing, shelter, commodity prices, and heating facilities at various times and in various countries; he tries to make clear what provisions were taken aboard a Viking ship (he thinks there would be beer, bread, smoked meat and cheese); and he always tries to establish the period at which important inventions were made. Nevertheless his fundamental aim is purely intellectual as he steadily seeks to win his readers over to his ideals and to induce them to help in their realization.

Experience showed him that there are certain postulates for the fortune and misfortune of a nation. He discovers that misfortune, as far as man is responsible for it, has two fundamental causes: religious fanaticism, and war, which is not infrequently a consequence of fanaticism, but is also often caused by the inconsiderate ambition of Kings.

He takes it upon himself to awaken the nation to be on their guard against the bloodthirsty dogmas of the priests, as well as against ambition on the part of the rulers, which tempts them to wars. This does not mean that Voltaire criticizes the past by the standard of the present. He sees the papacy of the middle ages as the only power able to cope with the martial brutality of the worldly rulers, and he esteems the quiet study and peaceful spirit which were fostered in the medieval cloisters. He never underestimates the force for good that a wise benevolent tyrant can exercise. One should read his book on Peter the Great!

But he is horrified, on looking back in history, to see a tapestry of follies and outrages woven by the habits of generations. He is angered by his childish and servile predecessors, the earlier historians, the medieval chroniclers, as well as the clerical academics of more recent years, who glorify barbarity, deceit and lying, cloak injustice as strictness and never dare to brand the stupid pride of the rulers and the foolish and cowardly humility of the nations.

On the whole Voltaire's colossal work is surprisingly exact.

IX

TOURNAY

1

About the year 1760 Voltaire became more and more active as a protector and helper of the weak and helpless. He began to feel it his duty to be the intercessor for, and savior of, those mistreated by fanaticism.

He begins by interesting himself in people, great and small, whom he finds at the mercy of flagrant injustice.

A cousin of Pierre Corneille died poor because he had lost his fortune by vouching for a friend. The son of this man, Jean François Corneille, lived in very needy circumstances as a letter-carrier in a village near Evreux. He was without any education, could scarcely read or write, and did not even know that the name he bore was one of the greatest of France.

He was, however, told that as a Corneille he must be a cousin of the famous Fontenelle, and in his misery he decided to undertake the long journey to Paris to ask his influential relative for support and protection. But Fontenelle was then ninety-seven years old, and although he was not at all feeble-minded he had completely forgotten the branch of the family to which Jean François belonged. When the latter called himself a grandchild of Pierre Corneille, Fontenelle regarded him as an impostor; he did not know that the grandfather of his poor relation had had the same first name as his famous nephew. So Fontenelle left nothing either to Jean François or his sisters or brothers.

For a short time Fontenelle's heirs subsidized the man; then the help stopped. But an old friend of literature, Titon du Tillet, grieved to hear of the needy circumstances in which the last of the name Corneille was living, recommended him to Fréron who, as pub-

lisher of a weekly journal, had connections and influence. Fréron told Jean François to write a petition to the actors of the Théâtre Français, and they gave a benefit performance of Corneille's tragedy *Rodogune* and then another of *Bourgeoises de Qualité* for him; and as the public paid double prices and even more for the seats, no less than 5000 livres were taken in. The poor man, therefore, seemed to have been given help; but almost the entire sum was used up in paying off debts. Only a small residue was put aside to assure the twelve-year-old daughter, Marie Corneille, of a good education in the abbey Saint-Antoine. But when the father soon ran through this remainder also, he removed his daughter from the convent school.

The aged Titon du Tillet took an interest in the young girl and put her in the care of his nieces, when the young lyric poet Le Brun, who had seen her at the old man's house, got the idea of appealing to Voltaire to take an interest in her; in the name of the poet Corneille, he addressed a poetic epistle to him, setting forth that the younger rival of the great Corneille was the only proper protector of her youth. The first stanza reads:

> Un rival de mon nom (si quelqu'un le peut être),
> Voilà le protecteur que tu dois reconnaître;
> Tu peux en l'implorant l'élever jusqu'à toi.
> Voltaire est ce rival, du moins si j'ose en croire
> Les récits que la Gloire
> Sur la rive des morts en sema jusqu'à moi.

The poem was accompanied by a letter from Le Brun. With habitual generosity Voltaire answered at once, and he resolved so quickly to adopt the young girl that he did not even take the time to get any information about her. He imagined that she was a direct descendant of the great Corneille, and did not even ask who or what her father was. He wrote: "It is only fitting that one of the soldiers of the great Corneille should try to be of some small assistance to the grandchild of his general." The young lady should be sent to Lyons to the address of Tronchin. He would have a maid call for her there in his coach.

It is impossible to express oneself with greater

courtesy than Voltaire used in his answer to Le Brun. With his fine sensibilities he knew how to reverse the circumstances so as to make it seem that he had been paid a flattering attention.

"If she agrees, I am at her disposal, and I hope to be able to thank you until the last hour of my life for having given me the honor of doing what Fontenelle should have done. Part of the education of the young lady will consist in seeing us perform an occasional play by her grandfather, and we want to have her adorn scenes from *Cinna* and *Cid*."

When Voltaire learned that Marie Corneille was not a direct descendant of Pierre Corneille, he imagined that she was an offspring of the brother Thomas. That again was incorrect. At any rate he promptly wrote her a letter which not only reveals his fine feeling, but also a very special sympathy; he assures her that she would at his house find every facility for pursuing her religious obligations as far as she wished, and besides she should be free to occupy herself with music, reading and needle-work.

"If you should feel like taking lessons in geography, we will send for a teacher who will feel highly honored to instruct a descendant of the great Corneille; but I shall feel even more honored to have you in my home."

She was not to think of her wardrobe. His niece would take care of laundry and dresses. She would have the best tutors, and inside of six months she would be able to play the part of Chimène in *Le Cid*.

2

Marie Corneille arrived in December, 1760, and turned out to be very pleasing. She was frank, unaffected and lively, with a little pug nose and the loveliest eyes, and a large but charming mouth with pearly teeth. She was jolly, well-bred, and diligent, and pleased everybody. Voltaire wrote to her father congratulating him on having such a daughter, and he thanked him for having let her come to him. He was far from making her take a subordinate position

in the house. She lived like a daughter of the family.

Naturally her education had to be begun all over. Voltaire taught her to write and to speak pure and cultivated French, corrected her bad pronunciation, corrected the letters he had her write to him continually. He even went to Mass with her.

Nevertheless, the sanctimonious of the provinces set up a howl that the poor girl with the famous name was being led astray by this godless seducer of youth. She had left a convent, the anteroom of Paradise, and now she was in Tournay, the anteroom of Hell! And as was to be expected, Fréron who had first been approached on her behalf, did not miss the opportunity to strike heavily. As usual, he began by expressing himself with quiet subtlety, saving his poisoned knife-thrust for the last lines. He wrote:

"One would not believe what a sensation Monsieur de Voltaire's noblemindedness is causing in good society. It is the topic of discussion in the periodicals and newspapers, and I am convinced that these reports are a real torture to the modest poet, who knows that the main merit of good deeds is to keep them secret. Also, when so much fuss is made over this matter it makes it seem as if Monsieur de Voltaire is not exactly in the habit of giving similar proofs of kindness of heart, and that it is something extraordinary for him to regard misfortune with such sympathetic eyes. And yet it is only one year since he showed the same benevolence to a certain Monsieur de L'Ecluse, a former actor of the Opéra Comique, whom he has taken into his home and whom, to be brief, he treats like a brother. It must be admitted that Mademoiselle Corneille, after leaving the convent, will come into good hands."

This malicious insinuation struck at the same time Voltaire, Mademoiselle Corneille and de l'Ecluse, who was considered a seducer, and a pander.

3

Voltaire's resentment knew no bounds. At first he answered by explaining who belonged to his house-

hold, and showing that the young girl would have there the best companionship; then he stated that l'Ecluse had indeed appeared on the stage twenty-five years ago, but that, since then he had made his living as a dentist, that he had never lived in his house, but had simply come there four months before to look after the teeth of his niece. He had a home of his own in Geneva. Then Voltaire insisted that the matter ought to be prosecuted in the criminal court; he persuaded Le Brun to get François Corneille to file suit. But Malesherbes, who had literature and the press behind him, was to Voltaire's sorrow not inclined to set the law in motion because of the offending words, and nothing happened.

The consequence was that a country nobleman who had sought Mademoiselle Corneille's hand in marriage, in the hope of winning an aristocratic and well-educated girl for a bride, withdrew his proposal; he had read Fréron's remark about her and l'Ecluse, and besides he had learned that her father was a peasant who was a rural postman. He had never read the *Cid,* and thought that he had been made a fool of when he was told that Mademoiselle Corneille's nobility went back two hundred years.

As Voltaire could get no satisfaction for his ward in the courts, he published the *Anecdotes sur Fréron.*

Fréron also attacked Le Brun on account of his ode to Voltaire. He tried to ridicule every sentence of this ode, waddled over it like a quail from word to word, and covered them all with his filth.

Le Brun was not slow to return the compliment. First he published *L'Ane littéraire ou les âneries de maître Aliboron,* later *La Wasprie ou l'âne Wasp,* both of which were filled with invective. In these pamphlets he brought to light Fréron's abysmal and comical ignorance. The latter had written about a prologue to *Quintus Curtius,* which has no prologue; he had spoken of Falaris who stretched his victims over a bed; he meant Procrustes; he had spoken of Thespis as the founder of comedy, instead of the tragedy; he had said that a Sophonisbe (in Corneille) did not speak the language of tenderness of Athalie (in Racine). Obviously, he could never have read

Racine's tragedy if he imagined that the wicked queen spoke the language of tenderness.

4

There had been talk that the Académie Française should undertake an edition of the great French writers. Now Voltaire got the idea of publishing, in order to secure a nice dowry for Mademoiselle Corneille, an edition of the works of Pierre Corneille with an introduction and notes. He wrote at once to the French Academy, appealed especially to his old protector, its secretary Père Olivet, saying that he was making bold to ask the Academy to let him have Corneille's works. He would submit his work, sheet by sheet, to the sage assembly for their advice and criticism; he would prefer to have his critique of Corneille appear as an estimate that was not his own personal view, but the consensus of opinion of the most discriminating critics.

He actually did submit the sections which were to make up his work, to d'Alembert; in reply he received many critical hints, to which, however, he paid scant attention; this was wise, for the work could not have succeeded if a dozen hands had been felt in it.

By his name alone he succeeded in interesting all the wealthy men and women not only in France but in Europe, in the work he had undertaken for the benefit of his ward. Louis XV and Elizabeth of Russia, the King and the Queen of Prussia each subscribed for two hundred copies. Madame de Pompadour and Choiseul for fifty copies each, the Court banker La Borde gathered one hundred subscribers, the combined tenants-general sixty and Voltaire himself subscribed for one hundred copies. The nobility of England, who preferred the rougher Corneille to the more polished Racine, was represented among the subscribers with many of the greatest names, Lords Chesterfield, Lyttleton, Palmerston, Spencer, the Duke of Gordon. The nobility of France

was on the list with Cardinal Bernis, Count de Clermont, the Duke of Villars.

It is not too much to say that he went to this work with enthusiasm. True, in his heart he was a greater admirer of Racine than of Corneille; but since his youth he had felt warmly and strongly for the finest tragedies of the Father of French drama. With the passing of years, the worst plays and the weaknesses of the dramatist had faded from his memory, so that only the good remained in its splendor.

On coming back to it he found the splendor dimmed somewhat and the flaws reappeared in a way which shocked him. The frankness of his criticism shocked his friends even more. We have, d'Alembert's letter acknowledging the receipt of the criticism of *Cinna,* a very fine letter which delicately and considerately hints that he and the entire Academy wish that the work should become a monument and consequently wish that nobody should disagree with the commentator's estimate of one of the tragedies; therefore, Voltaire was asked to revise his criticism and to be extremely careful and considerate.

Loving the truth as he did, Voltaire found nothing to be changed.

Anyone who has read before his twentieth year this big two-volume commentary on Corneille for the first time, must have been inclined to find it reluctant, almost hostile, with its numerous objections and corrections. The writer of this book must confess to having felt almost the same way at that age, and many of Voltaire's opponents have felt, too, that a sort of jealousy of his predecessor has come over Voltaire, and instilled in him the desire to belittle him. This idea has not the least foundation. Voltaire is absolutely honest and we find educated contemporaries, as for instance Bernis, who considered he was too mild, in precisely that criticism of *Cinna* over which there was so much quarreling.

Another factor is that Voltaire's criticism, like later Laharpe's, indeed eighteenth century criticism in general, is nearly unreadable for us. We are bored to tears by their lusty expounding of lines and comments, their explanations of linguistic turns that are

obscure or obsolete. That Voltaire had become more and more conservative with the passing of years and attributed more importance to rules, is the least thing against this work; its real fault is that his criticism is so scattered.

For a while one hopes to find some comprehensive estimate of the character and work of Corneille. Then one is compelled to abandon this hope. Voltaire is a philological critic, like various later mediocre critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He goes into the minutest details, and neither sees the woods for the trees, nor the tree for the leaves.

5

Voltaire made Ferney one of the most pleasant places in France. Not only was the castle beautifully built in the style of the time, surrounded by its gardens of rare plants, but he had proven to be a useful man for the entire vicinity in which he lived. The council in Geneva gave him permission to drain the swamps which poisoned the province with their odor and made their vicinity barren.

At first Voltaire confused injustice with illegality. This happened, when he strongly supported his vassals in their refusal to pay tithes to the priest of the nearby village of Moens; for several years they believed they were not compelled to pay this tithe, but they were ordered to do so by the parliamentary court in Dijon (1758). Two of the most prominent farmers were thrown into the prison of Gex on this account, and after Voltaire had interviewed various ecclesiastical and secular authorities on their behalf, he gave from his own pocket the twenty one hundred livres which they had been unable to pay.

In the next matter which concerned the priest of Moens, a certain Ancian, the priest was unquestionably in the wrong.

One day this priest learned that three young men of the village on returning from hunting, had called on a widow, Burdet, whose reputation was not the

best and were eating supper there. A certain Dubi gave him this information, and added that they were probably sitting there at that very moment, making fun of the priest. This was enough to make Ancian get up from the table at which he was eating, collect a number of farmers, enlist a few more at an inn, and set out for the widow's house. He armed his men with staves and clubs, "heavy enough to fell an ox." His ruffians surrounded the house, and he, with four or five men forced his way into the kitchen where the three hunters were sitting at their meal. His motive seems to have been that he was in love with the widow, and he shrieked at her like a madman: "So that's how you sit here and drag my good name in the mud!" He knocked down a hunting dog with his club, and when the dog's master demanded satisfaction he answered with a slap in the face. His companions attacked two of the hunters, beating them into insensibility. When the third drew his knife they hit him on the head until he lay unconscious. The farmers trampled them. When one of the three, thinking he was near death, cried out: "Shall I die without confession?" the priest called: "Die like a dog, die like a Huguenot!"

As can be seen, Voltaire here had to do with a temperamental priest. Two of the injured were too convinced of the power and the influence of the priest to dare protest. The father of the third, by the name of de Croze, filed a suit whose author is not hard to guess. Voltaire writes to Gabriel Cramer: "The case of the poor de Croze would be inconceivable in any other country than in France. A priest! A deliberate murderous assault! A priest assures his accomplices their safety! He deserves the wheel, and is still unpunished." The priest was very rich, and Voltaire hoped to procure a considerable compensation for the aggrieved. But for a long time the latter did not dare to file the suit. "He will kill me if I do," he said. "All the better," Voltaire replied, "that furthers our case." And he exerted every effort to send the priest to the galleys in order to secure satisfaction to his vassal. That, however was more easily said than done. The priest was confident of his powerful pro-

tectors. Those he had enlisted for the attack, fled. He himself stayed coolly where he was.

President de Brosses, who knew the father of the assaulted de Croze to be a decent, inoffensive man, wrote in sharp reproof of the violence of the priest; however, he reproached Voltaire openly for having become mixed up in the matter and for having prejudiced witnesses in advance, whose impartiality should have been unimpaired. He declined to include in the case the Jesuit Fessi, who was charged by Voltaire with having threatened to withhold absolution from the plaintiff's daughter, unless she induced her father to drop the case. For there was no way in which a priest could be punished legally because he had found a penitent unfit for absolution.

Voltaire had to be content that the priest was sentenced to pay to de Croze 1500 livres—which surely was a far lighter sentence than galley and wheel. Just before this Voltaire had paid 2100 livres to Ancian, to free his farmers from the tithe; so the priest could easily spare the 1500.

6

At about this time Voltaire began a lawsuit in a matter of his own. This is the one with President de Brosse, a quarrel which was due to a sad mistaking of Voltaire's sense of justice, or rather of his dogmatism.

President de Brosses who was the highest official in Dijon, within whose Parliamentary jurisdiction Ferney lay, was cultured, brilliant, sarcastic, and learned, a lively spirit in a little body, a conscientious official, inflexible as steel when it came to a question of law.

He met Voltaire in Geneva, in 1756, and was much attracted to him. He himself was a gifted writer, the author of charming letters of his journey through Italy in 1739 and 1740. Besides these he had written a profound study of Sallust, and attempted to reconstruct the lost parts of the Latin author's work. He was worthy in every way of Voltaire's friendship, and

it seemed as though this friendship should have been strengthened on both sides when Voltaire purchased from him the estate of Tournay.

At first the two distinguished men exchanged compliments. Voltaire, who had bought a life tenure on the estate, had informed the President that he was making a good bargain, for at the outside he had no more than five or six more years to live. The President answered: "What? You give yourself only five or six more years? No such clause in our contract, I insist! Otherwise the deal is off. I demand, on the contrary, that after we have come to terms you shall live the century to its end to give it splendor and to enlighten it. Fate would earn itself a nice reputation if it did not let you outlive Fontenelle. It is already in too bad odor with the public to dare to fail in this." And he writes in a subsequent letter: "shall I tell you a secret? Before a man like you I shall hide nothing. When the angel of fate guided Zadig through the world, he left a talisman in this old castle (Tournay), which prevents anyone from dying there. My old uncle lived to be ninety-one years old and his grandfather eighty-seven. It is lunacy on my part to part with a place which secures a real immortality in an altogether different way than the Academy."

It would be hard to imagine a more friendly and agreeable letter from seller to buyer of a property, or a better expression of admiration for the man and his works.

After some hesitation Voltaire closed the deal. But before long he became convinced that the position of feudal lord carried certain disadvantages with it. One of his farmers, by name of Panchaud, had taken a sabre and wreaked such violent revenge upon a fellow who had stolen some nuts from him that he was almost sentenced to be hanged for it. He finally got off with exile, but was fined two hundred pistoles, which of course he was unable to pay, so Voltaire as his fendal lord was obliged to pay for him.

This legal but unfair expense irritated Voltaire and he became vexed at every bill that was presented to him as Lord of Tournay.

He himself said jokingly that he made his grand

entry into Tournay like Sancho Panza arriving on the island. As a matter of fact, as we can see from a letter of the Genevese Madame Galantin, his entry was splendid. It took place on Christmas Eve of 1758. She writes:

"He was paid every possible honor; salutes from cannon and musket, drums and whistles. All the peasants bore arms. The shots frightened the horses of his coach. Little girls brought him oranges in baskets entwined with ribbons. Monsieur de Voltaire was very pleased and gay. He found a wide difference between his reception here and that at Ferney, where there were none but peasants. He was in gala attire, and his niece was decked with diamonds. . . . The priest delivered a speech. Monsieur de Voltaire said to him: 'Ask anything you like for the restoration of your parsonage; I shall grant it.' The young girls of the community brought flowers for the ladies. A gunner and several cannon had been borrowed from Geneva. The health of the new lord of the castle was drunk to the accompaniment of cannon shots. I declare, I believe that it was the happiest day of his life."

Voltaire had scarcely taken over the property when he commenced clearing, felling trees, demolishing, restoring, rebuilding, cultivating, changing, improving. He had promised to make improvements amounting to 12,000 livres before four years were up: In the first six months he had already spent 15,000 livres. The revenues of the estate were used to alleviate the great misery of the vicinity.

He had contracted not to lessen the value of the property, but to have it at his death in the same condition in which he had taken it over. The President, who was a somewhat cranky gentleman, learned that Voltaire had cleared a little forest of pine and oak, in order to make instead a meadow which gave more profit. Whereupon the President demanded an inventory of the property, in order to be able to control the changes, and empowered a Monsieur Girod to protect his interests, a move which offended Voltaire.

This was the situation when a trivial but bitter controversy arose. Shortly before Voltaire bought Tour-

nay, trees had been felled in the forest and the wood had been sold to a wood dealer named Charlot Baudy. As Voltaire needed fire-wood to heat the rooms in the castle, President de Brosses told him that this farmer still had some on hand, and Voltaire, having just bought the property on which this wood was stacked, thought that what he required was his by right. Then when Baudy presented his bill for fourteen cords of fire-wood, he refused to pay, insisting that the wood was included in the purchase price of the property.

From this developed an argument. The President writes (on January 30, 1761):

"Baudy tells me that when he asked you to pay for the fire-wood he supplied to you, you told him that I had made you a gift of the fire-wood. Please excuse me for repeating such a statement; you will understand that I am far from believing that you could actually have said such a thing, and far from giving his word the least weight. He is an ignorant peasant who is not familiar with the custom and usage of good society, and he does not know that though one sends a basket of peaches or a half dozen fowl to a friend, any gentleman would find it extremely odd to be sent fourteen cords of fire-wood as a present. . . ."

When with his usual stubbornness Voltaire refused to pay the farmer his money, and the President demanded his payment from the farmer, this petty dispute led the President to file suit against Baudy, and Baudy against Voltaire.

The latter, whose irritation had grown to an absurdity, wrote de Brosses a furious letter, in which he stated that the President's representative, Girod, had told his niece that if Voltaire bought Tournay outright, de Brosses intended to ruin her after his death. He enlarged further upon the disadvantageous deal into which he had been led in blind confidence, and upon how much the repairs had cost him already.

The President returned the letter to Voltaire after writing his answer on the margin, probably the sharpest Voltaire had ever received from a prominent man since Frederick's irate letter about the lawsuit with Hirschel.

"Do you remember, Monsieur, the advice I gave you one day some time ago in the course of a conversation in which you told me of the complexities of your life and confessed that you were naturally inclined to be extreme and I gave you my friendship? As a sign that I have not taken it back, I am going to repeat my advice: never write letters when you are not in full possession of your senses, lest you should later have to blush for what you have written. . . . Certainly I would gladly have given you several cords of wood, had you asked me for them; but I thought that I would offend you with a gift of this sort. However, as you do not disdain it I give you this wood and shall tell Baudy about it if you will send me the following receipt:

"I, the undersigned François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *chevalier, seigneur de Ferney, gentilhomme ordinaire du Roi,* hereby acknowledge that Monsieur de Brosses, President of the parliamentary court, has made me a gift of fire-wood to heat Tournay, to the value of 281 francs, for which I thank him."

It is sad to think that this wretched debate, thanks to the stubbornness of both parties, lasted the whole year. The process was not brought to an end, and although it is not known exactly how the affair was settled, one may draw some conclusion from the words of the President to a Monsieur de Fargès (November 10, 1761) : "In this moment I have an idea. This is the only thing to which I can honorably agree, and then everything will be over. Let him in your presence send the 281 livres to the priest in Tournay or to Madame Galantin, with instruction that they be distributed among the poor on my land, or his if he'd rather call it so; this is the shortest and most comfortable way."

Unfortunately the foolish incident was not closed with this. Voltaire considered himself so offended that in 1770, when de Brosses tried to gain admission to the Academy he wrote to d'Alembert and through him to his numerous admirers and followers, to block the election. He finally went so far as to announce that he would renounce his title as an Academician, if he were given de Brosses as colleague. The result

was that another was elected. He held this grudge because he remained convinced that he had been in the right, and that he had been forced to yield to superior judicial power.

X

ADVOCATE OF THE RIGHT

1

The fight with President de Brosses shows Voltaire in his worst light as an unjust and queer old man.

As soon, however, as an appeal was made to his sense of justice and to his humanity, as soon as he heard in the air the call to take up the fight against the prevailing tyranny of unreason and fanaticism, then the man was changed, the queer, old graybeard became an undaunted and stubborn young man, the crank became the champion of justice.

Another Voltaire reveals himself before our eyes. The pettiness which disguised him has blown away or been consumed in flame.

2

A Huguenot, Jean Calas, an honest, peaceful man of sixty-three who got along well with Catholics and Protestants alike, was living in 1761 with his family in the rue des Filatiers in Toulouse, in a house where he traded in cotton goods. With his wife Anna Rose Cabibel he had four sons and two daughters. A maid, Jeanne Viguier, who was a strict Catholic, lived in the house.

One of the sons, Donat Louis, had been converted to Catholicism and seldom appeared at his parents' home; another of the sons was in Nîmes serving his apprenticeship; the two daughters were visiting friends in the country.

On October 13, 1761, only two of the sons, Marc-Antoine and Pierre, were at home. Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon a visitor appeared. Gaubert Lavaysse, the son of a well known lawyer of the parliamentary court in Toulouse. He came

from Bordeaux and was passing through the city on his way to St. Domingo, as he wanted to visit his parents who were staying in the country. But he had not been able to hire a post-horse. Jean Calas invited him to supper. The young man glady accepted. After going out again to make another attempt to engage a horse for the next day, he returned for supper at seven o'clock.

During the meal, which did not last long, nothing of any importance was discussed. At dessert, Marc-Antoine, got up and went to the kitchen which adjoined the dining room. To the maid's question as to whether he was cold, he answered, "On the contrary, I am burning hot." They went to the living room and sat there until about ten o'clock, when young Lavaysse arose to take his leave. Pierre, who meanwhile had fallen asleep, was awakened to light the guest downstairs. Right afterward a cry was heard, and Jean Calas ran down the stairs.

The two young people had found wide open a door leading from the vestibule into the shop; approaching it to see if some one had sneaked in, they discovered Marc-Antoine, who had hanged himself on the cupboard doors. Over the doors a stick was laid and around it a cord was tied in a double noose, on which the body hung.

When Jean Calas got there he lifted his son up so that the stick fell down. He laid his son's body on the floor and freed it from the string. He called Pierre to summon a physician who lived nearby. In the meantime, Madame Calas had come downstairs and vainly tried to revive Marc-Antoine. When Gorsse the physician felt the pulse, he knew at once that death had come. No injury could be found on the body. But when he turned back the black neckerchief, he saw the bruise on the neck, caused by the cord. Desperately Pierre once more ran to secure aid if possible. His father called after him: "Say nothing about your brother's having laid violent hands on himself; spare at least the honor of your poor family."

Pierre hurried to one of the friends of the family, Cazeing, where he knew that Lavaysse had gone and

got Lavaysse's promise to say nothing about the suicide. But nevertheless Lavaysse took it upon himself to summon a member of the council. The latter reported the case, and upon Pierre's return home an alderman, David de Beaudrigue, appeared with a guard of forty men. He arrested Pierre, who had remained alone with the body after his parents had retired. David de Beaudrigue sent for a professor of medicine, Latour, and two surgeons, Lamarque and Pyronnet: They inspected the body where it lay. Meanwhile it had become half past twelve at night.

3

In the meantime, in front of the house an excited crowd collected from which suddenly a rumor could be heard passing from mouth to mouth: "Marc-Antoine was murdered by his family because he wanted to become a Catholic."

Now a thought struck David de Beaudrigue. A fanatic himself, he seized on the explanation given by the fanatic crowd. He had the Calas couple, Pierre, the maid, Lavaysse, and Cazeing arrested and brought to the city hall where the body was brought. David de Beaudrigue was so sure of his theory, and so positive that he had arrested the murderers of the young Calas that he replied to a colleague who recommended moderation, that this was a matter of faith, and that he would take the responsibility.

He overlooked the fact that, if a murder had been committed, he had in disregard of the edict of 1670, done everything to blot out the traces of the crime. It was prescribed that the inquest should be held at the scene of the murder and nothing should be touched so that it could be seen if a struggle had taken place. But no one had taken care to leave things untouched, or to investigate whether those arrested had traces of a struggle on their hands or their clothing.

All defendants swore that they had found Marc-Antoine's body on the floor. This was correct only as far as it concerned Madame Calas and Jeanne Vi-

guier. Jean Calas and his son Pierre and Lavaysse tried to hide Marc-Antoine's suicide, because of their fear of the shame, which was attached to death by one's own hand. A suicide's property was confiscated by the crown. The body was dragged, naked and face-downward, through the streets, and the crowd threw stones and dirt at it. Finally it was hanged on the scaffold.

It is only natural that the father wanted to spare the son's body this treatment; and it is no less natural that those who had seen the dark stripes on the neck of the body did not believe the statements of the defendants, and were equally skeptical when later on the defendants, fearing to be convicted as murderers, withdrew their statements, admitting that the case was one of suicide.

4

The deceased had been an ambitious young man; he wished to become a lawyer. But in France at that time no one was admitted to the bar until he could give proof that he was Catholic.

As Marc-Antoine did not wish to change his faith the legal career was out of the question. He had no choice but to become a merchant, in spite of his distaste for this calling. He wanted to form a partnership with an acquaintance, but was unable to raise the necessary capital, and when he then asked his father to take him into his business, he was seriously hurt by the denial of his request to become a partner rather than an employee.

He had always been inclined to melancholy. Now that everything went wrong he grew more depressed than ever; his interest in his work flagged, his energy disappeared, he became an idler, and a gambler, sat all day in the cafes and recited poetry, preferably desperate monologues on suicide from tragedies, like the soliloquy of Hamlet. This condition finally induced him to put an end to his life.

No thought was further from his mind than to become a Catholic, and no thought was further from

his father than to murder him if he had. For, the third son of the family had become Catholic without having any difficulties, and the maid was a devoted Catholic and was on excellent terms with her employers. Calas was not to blame that bigoted Catholics imagined it was one of the teachings of Calvin that a father was to kill his son if the latter changed his religion. They also believed that it was one of the commandments of the Talmud that the Jews should kill a Christian child and make their bread for Easter with his blood.

The point, as to whether this was a case of murder or of suicide, was not decided by any judicial inquiry, but by the fanaticism which the court had in common with the crowd. The body was left lying in the chamber in which the defendants were tortured. On November 7, the Crown attorney put before the aldermen a motion that the body be interred. David de Beaudrigue, seized the opportunity, without consulting the board of aldermen, to approach the priest of the parish in which the Calas family lived, requesting him to bury the body according to the Catholic rites.

This move practically forced a verdict, that there was no question of suicide, and that Marc-Antoine had intended to become Catholic and had lost his life for that reason.

The burial was staged like the glorification of a martyr who had become a victim of his faith in the Church that was the One Salvation. It was fixed for a Sunday afternoon so the entire populace could show its sorrow. And with a packed congregation the Mass was held in St. Stephen's Church, and the coffin lowered into consecrated soil. As Diderot said aptly: "Only if the body of the martyr was exhumed and dragged naked through the streets, could the unfortunate father hope to be absolved from the guilt of murder."

The court of first instance was the municipal court of Toulouse. This was composed of twelve members, two of whom had purchased their positions for life. Being unremovable, these exerted the most influence and dominated the others who were elected for a

limited term by the prominent citizens. In criminal cases four more were added from the city council. David de Beaudrigue a member of the court, was a conceited rogue, whose power had gone to his head. All his life was spent fawning upon his superiors and bullying those whom he had at his mercy. Beaudrigue's chief aim—as can be seen from his reports to the Prime Minister—was to draw the government's attention to his loyalty at the expense of that of his colleagues, in order to win this or that distinction from Versailles. His religious fanaticism was as great as his meanness.

5

As the depositions of the first witnesses did not give sufficient evidence for the indictment of the defendants, the Church issued a warning that anyone able to give information in this matter was to report on pain of excommunication. According to the law of 1670 the one suspected of a crime was not to be mentioned by name in such a warning; moreover the call must be for witnesses for the defense as well as for the prosecution. The law was infringed in both points. And this had far-reaching consequences. Sixty-five of the eighty-seven witnesses reported only after the issue of the warning, and the examination of witnesses was now entirely in the hands of the Church. Of all the witnesses questioned, only one, a lawyer by the name of Charlier, testified for the innocence of the father. All attempts on the part of Calas' daughters and their friends, to establish the truth, were wrecked by David de Beaudrigue. He frightened everybody who had in mind to speak in favor of Calas. As he was suspected of having tampered with the date on one of the documents (to hide its invalidity), and also as he had expressed in advance his conviction that Marc-Antoine had died a martyr's death, the defendants had the legal right to demand his removal as judge. The friends of Calas, wrote a petition to this effect, but were never allowed to file it; for, nobody was allowed to approach the

accused to secure their signatures to a power of attorney. As long as the trial was in the hands of the municipal council, no lawyer was given access to the documents.

The trial did not produce any proof of the guilt of the family. Nobody could testify that Marc-Antoine had become Catholic or even thought of doing so. During the hearings snares of all sorts were set for the couple. The judge insisted that he had proof that their son was about to change his religion. The defendants answered that they knew nothing about it; their son had always been a good Protestant. When Madame Calas was asked whether, in her opinion, a father had any right to determine the faith of his son, she answered that in a matter of faith it was not the paternal authority that should decide, but the conscience and the inner enlightenment.

In the article under "Criminaliste" in his *Dictionnaire,* Voltaire says the harsh and true words:

"The judge is a barbarian in official robes, who sets snares for the defendant, lies brazenly in order to get at the truth, and frightens the witnesses so that without being aware of it they give evidence against the defendant. He drags out obsolete laws from the time of the civil wars, tries to suppress everything that might clear the defendant, and to exaggerate everything that might serve to his conviction. Not like a judge, but like an enemy, he summarizes the contents of the documents: in short, it is he who deserves to be hanged rather than his fellow-citizens whom he condemns to the scaffold."

Had the Calas really deliberately planned a murder, they would scarcely have sat calmly at the table and even invited a guest for supper. This much was plain to everybody. Therefore the court maintained that the supper was a fabrication and that Lavaysse and the maid Jeanne Viguier were accomplices in the crime. On November 10 Lagune moved that Calas, his wife and Pierre be sentenced to be hanged, that their property be confiscated and that Lavaysse be sent to the galleys and Jeanne Viguier to prison for five years.

This decision was appealed to the parliamentary

court, which, because of the many illegal moves on the part of the prosecution, granted a new hearing.

6

Now the case came before the parliamentary court of Toulouse, which consisted of two judges and eleven councillors. Only one councillor, de la Salle, was convinced in advance of the innocence of the defendants, and the frankness with which he avowed it resulted fatally to them; for he was conscientious enough to declare himself disqualified on account of previous prejudice, and thus the accused were robbed of a vote. To all the other members of the Parliament, all bigoted Catholics, this was a religious trial. Sixty-three new witnesses were summoned, whose testimony naturally added nothing to what was known. Some were false witnesses, among them a certain Cathérine Damière, who declared that she had recently gone over to the Catholic faith and that Marc-Antoine had warned her against reverting to Protestantism, although she was proven never to have been a Protestant, but a Catholic since her birth.

Various articles were published in Calas' defense. One, anonymous, is ascribed to de la Salle, several others to the clever lawyer de Sudre, who thereby lost for many years his numerous clientele. For not only the populace and the clergy, but also the parliamentary circles were passionate fanatics. When Jean Calas, who was to be sentenced first, was led to his last hearing, he saw a pyre in front of the Parliament building. It was there for the burning of the book of a Protestant clergyman. But Calas, believing that it was for him and that he was to die at the stake answered without his usual firmness. His confusion was interpreted as decisive proof of his guilt.

On March 9, 1762, he was sentenced to undergo the ordinary and extraordinary torture, by which he was to be forced to name his accomplices. Thereafter dressed only in a shirt, bareheaded and barefoot, he was to be ridden to the church on a hurdle to do his penance. Finally he was to be broken upon

the wheel in the Place de Saint George, and left tied to the wheel with his face toward heaven "to live there as long as God would let him breathe." His body was to be burned and his property be given the King as a fine.

The ordinary and extraordinary torture consisted partly of forced drinking of water, at the ordinary torture eight cans of water, at the extraordinary torture sixteen cans, partly of the Spanish shoe, which meant that the leg of the tortured victim was put between two boards which were screwed together as firmly as possible, after which wedges were driven between them with heavy blows of the hammer. As a rule the bones were crushed during this process. Here, too, were two degrees: There were four or eight wedges driven in. Jean Calas underwent the ordinary as well as the extraordinary torture. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the feet and hands were twisted out of their sockets. This torture was employed in France outside of Paris until 1788.

7

The day after the sentence had been imposed it was carried out. After Jean Calas had gone through the torture and had done public penance before the church, he was led in the shirt only to the place of execution. He was tied face-outward on a St. Andrew's cross, and laid on the scaffold. Over niches in the cross lay the extremities that were to be broken with an iron rod by the executioner. Next came a few blows on the chest. The executioner's art consisted in keeping the criminal alive as long as possible, so that the spectators could enjoy his torture. Then the body was tied to a coach wheel in such a way that the toes touched the back of the head.

The report of the torture shows that Calas remained firm and again and again attested his and the other defendants' innocence. From the hurdle that brought him to the square he cried his innocence to the crowd. Even on the scaffold he did not waver. At each blow from the executioner he made only one

cry. When his broken hands and feet were being tied to the wheel, one of the two Dominican monks who had accompanied him, tried once more to extort a confession from him. Calas could only murmur that he was hurt that the monk, too, believed him guilty.

In the eighteenth century the poor wretch who was unfortunate enough to remain alive on the wheel as long as two days and two nights, was strangled in some cases by the hangman. When this was to be done was determined by the humane judges, for they knew how to make one death into a half dozen.

The French people were educated to cruelty by the criminal justice of the old régime. If they showed cruelty in the Reign of Terror, it was because they had learned it from the autocracy, and it was mild in comparison with that of the Monarchy.

When Damiens had endured every conceivable torture, and the horses that were to tear him to pieces were making vain efforts, the crowd had pity only for the poor horses, and when one horse finally succeeded in pulling off a leg, the crowd cheered. Not one lady left her window seat; they looked on through opera-glasses, nibbled at bonbons, and cracked jokes; Casanova's memoirs give evidence that many looked on and were moved to lewdness.

In 1742, a certain Desmoulins was broken upon the wheel, and lived for twenty-two hours afterward, until the Parliament of Paris was asked for permission to strangle him. Shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution a broken criminal lay in the Place Dauphine in Paris for two days and nights clamoring on the wheel, and the only effect on the populace was that those living in the vicinity asked that the terrible noise which disturbed the quiet of night be brought to a stop. Voltaire often remarks that decent people who drove through the Place Grève merely asked the coachman to drive faster, and that they sought to forget at the opera what they had seen.

When the moment approached in which Calas was to be strangled, David de Beaudrigue approached the tortured man once more, to extort a word from him that could be interpreted as a confession. Calas, however, did not answer, simply turned his face away.

8

It was a great disappointment to the judges and for the Minister Saint-Florentin, that in spite of this strenuous procedure, no confession whatsoever of the murder was extracted.

The more violent wanted to proceed against the other defendants, and no means remained untried. They were intimidated by every means; they were informed that their execution, too, was awaiting them. A monk entered the cell of Pierre Calas and informed him that he was to be executed; Pierre and Lavaysse resolved now, in the hope of a milder fate, to be converted to the Catholic faith. This, however, did not keep the general prosecutor from demanding that Madame Calas, Pierre, and Lavaysse should die on the scaffold, and the maid be imprisoned for life.

Finally Pierre was sentenced to exile for life. The charges against the rest dropped. A considerable minority protested against this judgment, as the sixty-three-year-old Jean Calas, who suffered from gout, could not possibly have hanged his unusually strong, lithe twenty-eight-year-old son without assistance; therefore, if the others were absolved of the murder, the horrible execution of the father became a judicial murder.

Pierre was only apparently sentenced to exile; he was led out of the city through one gate and back again through another, and imprisoned in a monastery. Four months later he succeeded in escaping.

Lavaysse was released. Rose and Nanette Calas had fled to Montauban, where their mother, too, as soon as she had been given her freedom, took refuge. But they were not destined to remain together for long. The President du Puget, with the aid of Saint-Florentin (who as Minister persecuted the Protestants with harsh tyranny for fifty-two years) secured two *Lettres de cachet* against the daughters of Jean Calas; the Huguenots in Montauban had dared to extend their sympathy to them so each of them was taken to a separate convent in Toulouse, Rose to Notre

Dame, Nanette to the Visitandins, where they were cut off from the outside world.

9

The execution of Jean Calas made the Protestants of southern France fear new persecutions from the Catholic population as they had, at first, to believe him guilty. At first, Voltaire also believed that he was guilty. From a letter of March 22, 1762, one can see that originally Voltaire did not doubt that this Huguenot of Toulouse had wanted to sacrifice his son after the example of Abraham.

A merchant of Marseilles, Dominique Audibert, drew his attention to the contradictions in the sentence imposed as well as to the improbability of the crime itself. On March 25, he approached Cardinal Bernis and asked him for more accurate information. The truth was not clear to him yet. He wrote d'Argental two days later: "On both sides a terrible fanaticism predominates. It is necessary to get to the real truth of the matter."

Voltaire abhorred Protestantism almost more than Catholicism. "We are not much good," he says in one of his letters, "but the Huguenots are still worse." In reality they were, in his eyes, "fools and morons." All that could be said in their favor was that they were "persecuted fools." Calvin's attitude toward Servet was something Voltaire could not forget.

Voltaire had not the slightest doubt that the French Protestants, if they had the power, would not be a bit different toward other believers, than the Catholics. For he knew his Protestants in Geneva very well.

But he had the deepest distrust of the French Parliamentary courts. He knew, as he said, that there never passed a year in which the provinces did not sentence innocent fathers of families to a terrible death with the same unconcern with which one would kill a chicken in the poultry yard. Voltaire was inclined to blame the injustice at least partly on the fact that the office of judge was purchasable. This strange custom had its origin in the financial difficulties of

the state under Louis XII. The King sold the office for a sum, the interest on which was supposed to be equivalent to the income of that office. Francis I, Henry II and Henry IV followed this example, and ultimately judicial seats became purchasable as well as hereditary. While Voltaire, like most French writers, regarded this condition as a blot upon French justice, Montesquieu in his day had defended the practice of purchasing and inheriting judicial offices, in spite of the inconveniences which the custom brought with it; for only the well-to-do could become judges, and minors were by no means excluded. Montesquieu stated that in the course of centuries a judiciary nobility had come into being, who put such a value upon their dignity that *la noblesse de robe* stood next to *la noblesse d'épée*. This judicial nobility would under no circumstances permit an unworthy person to become one of their number. This, however, did not hold true during the eighteenth century, where no thought was given to the reliability of applicants for the purchase of judicial office. Besides, Montesquieu's defense is colored by the fact that he himself had purchased a seat in the Parliament of Bordeaux, and sold it without hesitation in 1726.

One advantage did indeed come out of the purchasability of office, namely, that the Parliaments or Courts remained independent of the government, which, considering the power of the French monarchy, was doubtless a good thing. The King could neither appoint nor dismiss the judges. This advantage was, however, more than balanced by the fact that Parliaments not only imposed sentences but also made laws.

As legislative bodies the Parliaments were in constant conflict with the Crown, and hence they sought to rob the Crown of its most important allies, the Jesuits. To the Jesuit party belonged the entire higher clergy of France, while the Parliaments themselves were Jansenistic. Damien's assault upon Louis XV, he scratched the royal skin slightly with a knife, which was punished with such unheard-of cruelty, gave the Parliaments a chance to deal the Jesuits a decisive blow. They described the assault as a consequence

of the morals of the Jesuits and referring to several century-old writings of the Jesuits, it was maintained that the *Society of Jesus* had preached the King's murder.

When Voltaire resolved to fight to establish the innocence of the executed Jean Calas he dared the opposition of all of France's Parliaments. For these it was an entirely subordinate matter whether Calas had been executed rightly or wrongly in Toulouse. At any rate he could not get any satisfaction without hurting the prestige of the Parliaments. It was the same train of thought that motivated the French General Staff about one hundred and thirty years later in the trial of Alfred Dreyfus. His innocence or guilt was of no matter; as he was sentenced, he had to remain on Devil's Island. The police commissioner Herault had even openly declared on one occasion, that no judge should hesitate to sentence an innocent man to die, if his death were to the great advantage of the general public. (d'Argenson's Memoirs, II. 110.)

10

At the beginning of 1762 the persecution of the Jesuits by the Jansenistic Parliament was fierce and passionate. It was only two years before the Edict which exiled the Order from France. Voltaire wrote on January 26, 1762, to Damilaville:

"Our infamous enemies are tearing each other to pieces. It is up to us to open fire on these wild beasts. While they bite each other we can aim at them." And on January 30th of the same year he writes to the same friend: 'The Jansenists and the Molinists are ripping each other to pieces and displaying their ugly wounds. The idea is to destroy the one party through the other, so that the ruins of both shall become a step to the throne of truth."

At the end of February Voltaire dared to publish his extract from a remarkable writing which a village priest, Jean Meslier, from Etrépigny in the Champagne, had left as his will. The writing is remarkable because in it a poor but highly talented priest, who

all his life had hidden his unbelief and his passionate and enthusiastic heathenism, speaks from the grave to reveal his contempt for all Christian doctrines, and as his dying wish asks God to forgive him for having preached them.

Even more than by the passionate protest of the dead village priest, Voltaire was aroused by the *Manual for Inquisitors* which the Abbé Morellet had discovered in Italy. In the year 1758 there appeared a *Directorium Inquisitorium* by Nicolas Eymeric, a grand inquisitor of the fourteenth century. In 1762 the Abbé published an extract from it in French under the title of *Manuel des Inquisiteurs.* Voltaire was enthusiastic about the book; he compared its impression upon him with that which the view of the bloody corpse of Cæsar had made upon the Roman populace.

Now he was firmly resolved to take up the gage of battle on behalf of the Calas family. He wrote (July 14, 1762) to d'Argental: "I shall drop this matter only with my death. For sixty years I have seen and endured so much injustice that I am entitled to the pleasure of undoing this wrong."

Voltaire had to win the support of those holding the same views. He approached d'Alembert, d'Argental and Damilaville. d'Alembert was the recognized leader of the philosophes in Paris, the official representative of Voltaire. As the ambassador of the Duke of Parma Count d'Argental was in touch with the political leaders and the prominent courtiers. Damilaville, however, was Voltaire's real agitator. Through him the "brothers" in Paris received the changing watch-word handed out by the distant field-general at any time. Damilaville, as head of the internal revenue bureau, was in charge of the seal of the comptroller-general. Under the protection of this seal, letters and writings which it was better not to have opened could always reach their destination without obstacle.

d'Argental was given the task of submitting the matter to Prime Minister de Choiseul. Voltaire wrote d'Alembert (March 29, 1762): "France becomes hated everywhere. Everybody says that we are as

barbaric as any feeble-minded nation which knows well how to break upon the wheel, but not how to win a fair fight, and which has progressed from the massacre of Bartholomew to comic opera. We are arousing the terror and the contempt of Europe; it grieves me, for we are intended to be agreeable."

He writes to Damilaville: "Since Bartholomew's Eve nothing has so disgraced the human species as the execution of Calas. . . . Cry out, yourself, and let others cry out! Cry out for the Calas family, and against fanaticism; the Infamy is to be blamed for their misfortune."

11

In spite of his passion Voltaire went to work cautiously and carefully, partly to make sure of victory, parly because in his innermost mind he was still uncertain; for he could not be positive that Marc-Antoine had not, as was so emphatically insisted, been converted to Catholicism. At the distance he was living, he could not be sure of having received an accurate account of the circumstances of the crime.

He therefore tried to learn all the points which were in favor of murder through the evidence of people who believed Jean Calas guilty, and tried to get new evidence for his innocence, through the statements of those who believed the murder theory preposterous.

In the first place he was interested in getting exact information as to the contents of the documents of the trial. As a historian, he approached the clerk of the court of Languedoc and expressed the hope that the Parliament of Toulouse would soon publish the documents of the Calas case, as the Parliament of Paris had published those in the case of Damien. His letter was ignored.

Next he wrote to Richelieu asking him to secure information for him. Richelieu gave Voltaire the advice to keep out of this affair and avoid all the

unpleasantness and trouble it might bring him; personally, Richelieu had not the slightest doubt of the guilt of the executed man. This reply could not fail to depress Voltaire and he was still more depressed on learning that the Minister Saint-Florentin had caused the two daughters of Jean Calas to be shut up in a convent.

Voltaire was most forcibly impressed by the fifteen-year-old son of Calas, Donat, who came to Geneva. Upon hearing of his arrival, Voltaire left Ferney at once and invited him to his estate Les Délices on Swiss soil. In a letter to Damilaville, March 1, 1765, Voltaire described his first meeting with the child:

"I had the young Calas come to my house. I expected to see a young fanatic of the sort that his upbringing sometimes produces. I found a simple, naïve child, quiet and attractive, who tried in vain to keep back his tears while he talked with me. He told me that he was serving his apprenticeship in a manufactory in Nîmes, when he learned from public announcements that his entire family was about to be sentenced to death in Toulouse. He had been told that nearly all of Languedoc believed in the guilt of the Calas family. In order to escape the terrible shame he was going to take refuge in Switzerland.

"I asked him if his father and mother had been given to violence; he answered that they had never struck one of their children and that no parents could have been more indulgent and loving.

"I admit that this gave me a strong prejudice in favor of the innocence of the family. I secured further information from two merchants of Geneva who had visited at Calas' home in Toulouse. They confirmed my opinion."

Voltaire's neighborhood was soon so convinced of the innocence of the executed man that the spectators at the performance of *Tancrède* in Ferney gave ringing applause at the following words:

> O juges malheureux, qui dans nos faibles mains
> Tenons aveuglement le glaive et la balance,
> Combien nos jugements sont injustes et vains,
> Et combien nous égare une fausse prudence!

As the Protestants in Switzerland felt they had much in common with those in France, a rather large organization was formed in Geneva with the purpose of collecting funds for the support and defense of the Calas family. The main point was to win the support of influential people, and this problem naturally fell to Voltaire. He enlisted the interest of the prominent men and women who had been guests at his house.

The most zealous was the Duchess d'Enville, who used her influence at Versailles. The Duke de Harcourt and the Marquis d'Argence de Diras were the next to be convinced, and Voltaire did not rest until he had overcome the resistance of the Duke de Richelieu and induced him and the Duke de Villars to approach Saint-Florentin. It was very important to win over the Chancellor Guillaume de Lamoignon, for he presided over the court which could reverse the decision of Toulouse. It seemed almost absurd to hope to win over this eighty-year-old man, but Voltaire persuaded the Marquis de Nicolai to ask his father, the President of *La Cour des comptes,* to use his influence upon the Chancellor; he also succeeded in persuading Castanier d'Auriac, President of the Great Council, to approach Lamoignon, who was his father-in-law. To Elie de Beaumont was assigned the task of enlisting the lawyers, and Madame de Pompadour promised to speak to the King himself about Calas.

12

To attain a rehabilitation of the unfortunate family of Toulouse Voltaire needed first an authorization of the widow of Jean Calas. She had to be induced to emerge from the retirement in which she had been living since she had been robbed of her two daughters; she had to be persuaded to undertake the journey to Paris, and the lawsuit could not be filed without her presence.

At first Voltaire seemed to meet here an obstacle that could not be overcome. The poor woman was so

frightened that she felt safe only where she lived in seclusion.

She was too depressed to dare a fight against the Parliament in Toulouse. She never mentioned her husband's name, always spoke only of the loss of her daughters; but Voltaire did not believe it right to seek to accomplish the reunion of the mother and her daughters until the trial that would re-establish the family honor had been started.

Voltaire made it so plain to Madame Calas that it was her sacred duty to clear her husband's name of the stigma attached to it, that early in June, 1762, she summoned up her courage and traveled to Paris, where Voltaire had promised her the friendship and guidance of d'Alembert, Damilaville and his own nephew, Abbé Mignot. As he feared that Madame Calas would not be in a position to win friends by her personal appearance, he allowed her but seldom to show herself in public.

Elie de Beaumont and Mariette had promised to take the case into court, and they waived the fee. But they could not conduct the case without knowing the documents concerning it; and the Parliament of Toulouse refused to permit them to take copies, even forbade anyone to consult the originals.

At first Voltaire had hoped that the Chancellor would ask that the documents be sent to him; as this did not happen he saw no other means than to arouse the public indignation. On July 5, 1762, he wrote to d'Argental:

"We do not demand anything more than to be told for what Calas was sentenced to death. What a terror is such a secret judgment that does not give its reasons! Is there any more awful tyranny than to be able to shed blood without having to account for it to anybody?—It is not done, say the judges.—Well, you monsters, then it must be done from now on. You do owe an account for the blood you shed!"

Parliament of course did not yield; but as Mariette filed a petition in August for the reversal of the decision, it may be assumed that Voltaire's friends in Toulouse succeeded in securing the documents secretly for copying.

The Lavaysse family showed little courage. Young Lavaysse's father, the prominent lawyer, refused to give consent in the name of his son, as it would cost him his position in Toulouse. Young Lavaysse, who was staying in Paris under an assumed name, was finally induced by d'Argental to give his signature.

13

When Voltaire wished to arouse pity for the Calas family in those who visited Ferney, he liked to introduce to them the two sons of Calas. For Pierre had made a successful escape from the Dominican monastery in which he had been imprisoned and had joined his brother in Geneva. Voltaire let Pierre as well as Donat live in Châtelaine, near Les Délices, and he subjected Pierre on his arrival to a questioning which took four hours. He wrote to Audibert in Paris: "I am spending my days and nights in writing letters to all those who can exert their influence to right a wrong that has attracted the attention of the whole world, and that, it seems to me, France's honor demands be cleared up. We have Pierre Calas here. I have questioned him for four hours; I shudder and I weep. But the point is to act."

When Richelieu visited Voltaire, he was introduced to Pierre, and this eye-witness of the occurrences knew how to describe the events so clearly that the Duke, who surely was not soft-hearted, but with all his faults was a grand seigneur, said to the young Calas: "You can count upon my influence and aid. As no longer you have a father, I shall be your father."

Before the lawyers began to act, Voltaire, as was his habit, wanted to prepare public opinion by the distribution of pamphlets. They are collected under the title: *Pièces originales concernant la mort de Sieur Calas et le jugement rendu à Toulouse.*

The first article is an excerpt from a letter of Madame Calas about what happened on that October 13, with Voltaire's comments added. The next document is written by Voltaire in the name of the young-

est son, and bears the title: *Lettre de Donat Calas, fils, à la Dame veuve Calas, sa mère,* dated June 22, 1762. The letter is touching and sagacious; touching in the love the son shows for his parents, sagacious in the sureness with which it shows the madness of the accusation because of which his father was broken upon the wheel.

The next pamphlet is a contribution the intention of which was to overcome the religious prejudices. The title reads *Mémoire de Donat Calas pour son père, sa mère et son frère.* In this, Voltaire makes the young Calas, without denial of his faith, avoid every appearance of extreme piety. He speaks with such respect of the Catholic religion that Catholic readers might be intrigued by the possibility of converting him; besides that he expresses his loyalty to the King with so much warmth that every chance of calling him a bad Frenchman was cut off.

Next is the clever *Déclaration* written in the name of Pierre Calas. Voltaire had a double end in view in this. In the first place he wanted to demonstrate that it was not the fate of a single man at stake, but the importance of the public's being enlightened as to the truth. Then it meant to win by moderation, the Parliament of Toulouse. By expressing confidence that, after being convinced of its error, it would of its own accord set zealously to work to do the right thing by the victim of a judicial error.

If the inkstand had not already existed, Voltaire surely would have invented it.

These writings at first made more impression in the Protestant countries, England and Northern Germany, than they did in France. The chief reason for this was that the French government regarded Voltaire's campaign with great indignation. The *Pièces originales* were attacked everywhere and their sale forbidden. Voltaire wrote: "In France a hundred innocent men might be broken upon the wheel, and all Paris thinks of is the latest play, and of the supper afterward."

The petition of Elie de Beaumont, which was signed by fifteen prominent lawyers of Paris, threw light upon the weakness of the evidence upon which

Jean Calas had been convicted, and the illegality of the entire trial. The lawyers who supported the petition denied that anyone should be sentenced for murder of his son on circumstantial evidence only, and declared that even if one were of contrary opinion, Jean Calas could not be pronounced guilty. In conclusion they enlarged upon the necessity of taking up the trial afresh.

Unexpected help came from a respected Catholic nun. Sister Anne Julie Fraisse, into whose care Nanette Calas had been given for conversion, had become convinced of the innocence of the entire family by the statements of the young girl, and as she had influential connections in Paris, when Nanette was freed through the efforts of the Duchess of Envilles, the nun gave the girl a letter to President Castanier d'Auriac asking his interest in the family. This letter caused a great sensation in Paris and was circulated in many copies.

In the meantime, Voltaire's opponents were not idle. The *Saint James Chronicle* published a letter of Voltaire to d'Alembert, which not only disparaged the Parliament of Toulouse but also slandered King Louis and the French Ministry. When the Duke of Grafton as well as the Duke of Choiseul sent Voltaire the issue, he had only to ask d'Alembert to send the original text to Choiseul, so the latter could see that whoever had stolen it from the mails and copied it had inserted a long section that was absolutely false, which was circulated to harm Voltaire and make the matter impossible.

That the case would not be decided by justice but by politics was plain to everyone. Consequently, Voltaire was well aware that everything depended upon whether the Crown considered it politically wise to deal sharply or courteously with the Parliament of Toulouse and with the Parliaments in general. The Parliament had offered opposition to the financial edicts. But Voltaire was somewhat afraid that the Crown might consider it more politic to be complaisant.

However, on May 7, 1763, the Council unanimously ordered the Parliament of Toulouse to send in the

documents of the trial. For Voltaire this was "a great day in the calendar of the philosophers."

The Parliament answered the request by demanding from Madame Calas twenty-five stamped sheets of paper and an advance of 40 ducats for the copies. She was forced to pay. Voltaire wrote (May 24, 1763): "Finally the infamous documents were mailed by the infamous judges. The Parliament of Toulouse first broke the man upon the wheel, then skinned the widow . . . O, what scoundrels!"

14

During the long interval that elapsed before the decision was handed down, he wrote among numerous other things his essay *Traité sur la Tolérance à l'occasion de la mort de Jean Calas* which was published strictly anonymously in the summer of 1763. The first attempt to smuggle a few copies into Paris was not made before November or December, 1763. The essay was put into the hands only of those who were in sympathy with the author, the Dukes de Choiseul and de Praslin, certain members of the Privy Council and Madame de Pompadour. Voltaire knew that a half century before every copy would have been burned, and he was satisfied to have the book reach only a few.

Voltaire knowing exactly how far his public would allow itself to be led, does not go so far as to suggest that the Protestants be allowed to hold their services openly. He merely advocates the principle of tolerance, reproaches the French thus: "In other countries members of different religions are able to live peacefully side by side; why should this not also be the case in France?" And he enlarges not only upon the thought that tolerance involves no danger but also that religious persecutions are the outcome of Christianity.

Beginning with the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," we have proceeded to: "Believe what I believe and what you can't believe, or I kill you." In civilized countries

we are content to say: "Believe or I shall abhor you; believe or I shall do you evil as far as I can; you monster! you have not my religion, hence you have no religion; and consequently you are an abomination to your neighbors, your city and your province!"

Shortly after the death of Francis I several pious members of the Parliament of Provence had asked the King for troops to execute nineteen heretics whom the Parliament had sentenced; they came, and the Parliament had them massacre six thousand people regardless of sex and age; they had to atone for being born in the Province of Vaux, and for having lived for three hundred years in a barren mountain region which they had made fertile. They read freely from the Bible and followed the Sermon on the Mount. These were their only sins.

Voltaire points out how tolerant China's civilization has proved; how extremely rare cases of religious intolerance had been in ancient Greece; how the Roman Empire always remained tolerant until Christianity came to the fore. Cicero doubted everything; Lucretius denied everything; nobody reproached them for that, in the slightest degree. Speaking of Hell, Cicero says: *Non est anus tam excors qui credat* (No old woman is so silly as to believe in it). Juvenal remarks: *Nec pueri credunt* (Not even boys believe it). The senate and the Roman people set up the great principle: *Deorum offensæ diis curæ* (Let the Gods take charge of the offences against the Gods). Still later on, when Paul was accused by the other Jews of Corinth before the proconsul of Achæa, that officer answered: "If it were a crime or a misdemeanor, I would listen to you gladly; but as it is a question of the doctrine and of the words and the law among you, settle it yourselves; I have no intention of being the judge of that."

Voltaire tries to explain to his religious readers that superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy; the relation is that of a crazy daughter to a dignified mother. He states that it requires neither great skill nor eloquence to prove that Christians should show indulgence to each other: "Yes, I shall go even further, and tell you that one should regard

all human beings as one's brothers.—What! A Turk my brother? A Chinaman my brother? A Jew? A Siamese?—Yes, of course. Are we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God?"

It is significant that among the many things that stirred up hatred against Voltaire during the reaction after the French Revolution, this proclamation of tolerance took first place. This advocacy of religious tolerance was considered especially devilish, and fitted the picture Joseph de Maistre sketches of him in his *Quatrième Entretien des Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg:* "With a madness without equal this brazen blasphemer called himself the personal enemy of the Saviour. . . . Other cynics have shocked the virtuous, but he shocked even the vicious. He plunged into the mire; wallowed in it, gloried in it; his imagination was inspired by Hell, which gave him the power to extend himself to the farthest limits of wickedness."

The entire *Credo* of Voltairian deism lies in the final prayer which concludes the anonymous essay on tolerance:

"I turn, therefore, no longer to my fellow-men, but to you, O God of all creatures, all worlds, all times. If it is vouchsafed to us, miserable insects who are lost in the immensity of the universe, if such are permitted to ask something of you, you who are the source of everything, you whose law is immutable and external, consider us worthy of your pity for the errors which are part of our nature! May our misdeeds bring no misfortune upon us! You did not give us hearts in order that we might hate one another, hands that we might slay one another. Help us to help our fellow-men in bearing the burden of a painful and insufficient life! Do not let the trifling differences in the clothing with which we envelop our puny bodies, in our poor languages, in our ridiculous customs, in our imperfect laws, our foolish opinions, our stations in society, which seem so far apart to us, yet so equal to you—let not all these petty differences be signals for hatred and persecution among the puny atoms called mankind! . . .

"May all men remember that they are brothers!

May they all abhor the oppression of souls as they abhor the robbery which snatches away the fruits of their toil and peaceful industry! Should the misfortune of war be unavoidable, let us at least not hate and tear each other to pieces in the midst of peace, and let us make use of the brief moment we have to live, to bless equally in a thousand languages your goodness which has given us this moment!"

15

We get some idea of the callousness to human suffering that Voltaire had to contend with, and of the whole barbaric system of punishment in France, when we stop to think that with the exception of La Bruyère not a single one of the first men of France in the seventeenth century, raised any protest against the stupidity and madness of the criminal legislation.

When Voltaire and his followers tried to make humanity play some part in the administration of justice, they ran up against the solid opposition of the clerical and pious factions. Not one French priest and not one pious man in France made the least effort to help the Calas family or contributed one sou for the support of the family which, thanks to the miscarriage of French justice, had been stripped of everything, even of their daily bread. And this is all the more strange, in that the clergy of the lower order who accompanied the condemned man to the place of execution, even followed him to the scaffold, knew better than any others just what the victims of this administration of justice suffered.

The bulk of the population never objected to a punishment as long as it was cruel. It never rejected any form of punishment as inhuman; on the other hand, there were sometimes riots in Place Grève when the mob considered some sentence too severe in proportion to the crime, as for instance, October, 1770, when the two Cardon brothers were broken upon the wheel because they had held up a man in the forests of Vincennes and robbed him of a sum of

fifteen francs; or as still in the year 1783, when a maid was hanged for a simple house theft.

Diderot stated (in *Jacques le Fataliste III*) that the populace went to the executions out of mere curiosity, not cruelty; he believes that people were attracted by the sights afforded by the scaffold and by the material it offered for future gossip. Voltaire himself frequently expressed his opinion that it was not pure sadism but plain curiosity that was the motive. He refers to the passage from *Les Plaideurs* of Racine when Daudin proposes to show Isabelle how people are tormented on the rack: "It's a good way to pass away an hour or two." But he knows perfectly well what a fascination the sight of suffering exerted upon his country-men.

"If the torture were a public spectacle, the entire city of Toulouse would come twice at the invitation of the public prosecutor to see the worthy Calas endure the most agonizing tortures. White-robed penitents, gray and black-robed friars, women, children, young girls, poets, Academicians, prostitutes, students, lackeys, housemaids, doctors of canonical law, all would have jostled one another for the view. In the same way they would have crowded to see the unfortunate General Lally, with a gag in his mouth, dragged to the place of execution.

"But if these spectacles for cannibals, these performances for a race which is sometimes called the most wanton and ignorant of justice in the world, if these miniature reproductions of St. Bartholomew, which transform apes into tigers, were played too often, if they were staged every day, it would not be long before people would abandon such a country; they would flee from it with horror, and never return to this land of hell, in which such barbarism takes place."

Voltaire says the same thing in almost stronger terms in a letter to d'Etallonde de Morival, who had escaped after being condemned to die as a heretic, and who on Voltaire's recommendation had secured a position in the service of Frederick the Great (May 26, 1767): "Our nation is frivolous, but it is cruel. There are in France perhaps seven or eight hundred

people of the better educated class, the cream of the nation, by whom foreigners allow themselves to be deceived. Among these few there are always ten or twelve who succeed in fostering some art. And the nation is judged by these, and the result is entirely misleading. Our old priests and officials are exactly like the Druids of antiquity, who practiced human sacrifices; customs do not change."

As far as literature is concerned, there was the wildest inconsistency. Although Helvetius' *De L'Esprit* and Rousseau's *Emile* were burned by the hangman, they were displayed for sale in the windows of every book shop in Paris. As a rule, the hangman did not burn a real copy of the book condemned; the copy was kept by one of the members of the Parliament, which had condemned the book to the pyre. What the hangman actually burned were valueless papers, old Bibles and documents from old lawsuits. In the midst of the official barbarism there was all sort of comedy and humbug, as in Russia under the Czar.

In the last section of his book on tolerance Voltaire mentions a letter he says he had received from Toulouse, in which he is threatened with having his essay burned publicly by order of the Parliament. He answers that he did not care. "For this essay on tolerance is a petition which is addressed to the mighty of this earth in the name of the human race. It is only a seed; but some day it will ripen to be harvested."

16

In 1762 the Jansenistic Parliament of Paris ordered the seizure of all properties belonging to the Jesuit Order for worldly use, and a royal edict of November, 1764, expelled the Jesuits from France. This victory of the Parliaments over the Jesuits, however, made them reckless. It strengthened their opposition to the passing of the tax-bills which the Crown had found necessary to put through to pay for wars. It was especially menacing to the Crown that the Parliaments had begun to unite.

The year 1764 finally brought the verdict of the Conseils in the Calas affair. In the previous year deputies from Toulouse had again come to Paris to prevent the reversal of the decision. But now the Conseil had no reason for consideration; for the Parliament of Toulouse had begun openly to resist the Government. When the King, in September, 1763, had sent the Duke de Fitz-James as Royal Agent to Toulouse to effect the passage of the finance edicts, the Parliament had replied by issuing a warrant for the arrest of the Duke. Even his life was threatened, so that he saved himself only by flight.

But by this the Parliament of Toulouse forfeited the good-will of the Parliament of Paris. For the Paris Parliament was the Tribunal of the peerage, and no other court in the country had the right to assume unto itself the prerogative of accusing or imprisoning a Peer of France. At Court this arrogance on the part of the Parliament of Toulouse was regarded as an insult to the entire French nobility, and the members of the Conseil, who took the part of the Nobility made use of the occasion for revenge on the Parliament of Toulouse.

The Referee of the Privy Council for Petitions, Monsieur de Fargès, demanded that the Parliament of Toulouse be called to account for its unjust and barbaric procedure in the Calas case, and when he was requested by the President of the Conseil to withdraw such violent expressions, he declared that he would be answerable for his words; the case was not such that there was any cause for consideration.

After examining the documents the Conseil declared that the judgments of the Parliaments of Toulouse of March 9 and 18, 1762, were violations of the law and were therefore void. By referring the case to the State Council instead of demanding a retrial, it struck at the other Parliaments also; for this procedure cast a doubt upon their impartiality. That the Parliament interpreted the verdict as a direct insult, is obvious. Voltaire was flooded with anonymous letters, in which all members of the Calas family were declared to be guilty, and whose writers were sorry that they had not all been broken upon the

wheel; other letters voiced such dire threats against him as the instigator of the entire proceedings, that he was glad not to be in the court district of Toulouse and in the power of the Parliament of Toulouse.

17

When the trial came before the Court of State Referees it was possible to bring out all the evidence of the innocence of the Calas family, which had been criminally withheld. Now everyone testified to what a just, mild man old Calas had been, what a wholesome family life had been led in his house, how Marc-Antoine had appeared until the last hour an over ardent Calvinist. A letter was produced, dated in 1761, in which Marc-Antoine called his brother an apostate.

Once more Voltaire spoke. Several days after the verdict had been announced, there appeared in Paris a pamphlet printing his fine letter to Damilaville, quoting several sentences about his first impression of Donat Calas. The letter once more retraces the entire matter from its first beginning, with extraordinary eloquence and cleverness, and connects it with the similar case of the Sirven family, with which we have not as yet had an opportunity to get acquainted.

In February, 1765, David de Beaudrigue had been dismissed. The pretext was some arbitrary act of which he had been guilty.

On February 28 all members of the Calas family had reported as prisoners to the Conciergerie.

Jean Calas was found innocent and awarded a reinstatement. Madame Calas, Pierre Calas, Lavaysse, Jeanne Viguier were acquitted.

Voltaire wept for joy when he received the news at Ferney, and he embraced young Donat Calas, who was at his house. He felt that he had never experienced a purer joy, and he probably never won a more decisive victory for humanity. Before he even learned the details of the judgment, he wrote a fine letter to Madame Calas.

The new judgment did not go so far as to demand

compensation from the judges in Toulouse, and Voltaire decided to let it go. He was afraid of the revenge they might take on the Calas family.

The Parliament of Paris had put every conceivable obstacle in the way of the dismissal of the charges. Carmontelle had made a drawing of the Calas family in the Conciergerie, and when Grimm had it engraved to sell it for the benefit of the family, the Parliament prohibited the sale, an illegal act, as Grimm had permission. But the Parliament claimed that the sale of this engraving would tend to further the heretical ends of the Protestants. In Toulouse the judgment of the state referee was not even posted. But this was just an empty demonstration. As Voltaire wrote, for the first time since fanaticism began to rage, the voice of the wise had silenced the voice of the pious.

Of course, the guilt of the accused family was still insisted upon. It was even said that in his innermost soul, Voltaire himself was convinced of their guilt. This same thing occurred in the last years of the nineteenth century in the Dreyfus affair, when the guilt of the Captain was violently insisted upon and the good faith of his defenders was questioned.

As was to be expected, Fréron came on the scene most ardently. He pretended that he had received a letter from "a protestant philosopher," with the request that he print it in his periodical. Nobody, he states, had felt more sorrow at the fate of the unfortunate family than himself; but the point was to evaluate properly the pretty conclusions of Monsieur de Voltaire.

In reality the letter was full of doubts as to the innocence of the Calas family and contained a sort of defense of the authorities in Toulouse. It belittled as much as possible the unselfish motives of Voltaire in the affair, and offended him most deeply. "Under these circumstances," wrote Fréron. "Monsieur de Voltaire's poetic head grew hot. He was not so much carried away by the feeling of humanity as by the urge to recall public attention to his existence to do something to make people talk about him."

Voltaire did not have to answer Fréron. Others

answered for him. The Marquis d'Argens, Brigadier in the Army, was so angered that he printed an open letter to Voltaire about Fréron, which, as Grimm says, would have provoked any man with the least shred of honor in his make-up to kill its writer or to die by his hand. Fréron, of course, made not a move in reply.

A perfect critic like Fréron would naturally be a zealous crusader for sexual purity. He hated Mademoiselle Clairon, because he knew her friendship for Voltaire; he therefore praised another actress, Mademoiselle d'Oligny, for the chastity of her private life. dropping such hints as to the debauched past of a certain other actress that his reference to Mademoiselle Clairon was unmistakable. All the actors took the part of their colleague, and approached the Marshal of Richelieu, who in turn, went to the King; who gave Fréron a heavy prison sentence. The critic pretended, however, to be bedridden when the police called for him, and made use of the delay to call upon the pious Queen, who pardoned him "for his piety and zeal in combatting the philosophes."

Fréron's last act concerning the man he had persecuted for a generation, took place when a statue was to be erected to Voltaire in his lifetime; the critic asked to be permitted to send a contribution. He was refused.

When he died in 1776, his widow had the priceless audacity to write to Voltaire asking him to adopt Fréron's daughter as he had Corneille's. Voltaire did not find the comparison apt.

18

The fame of the Calas trial traveled all over the globe, but this did not mean that the Protestants in France were to enjoy the same rights as the Catholics. But Jean Calas was the last Protestant who was sent to the scaffold by Catholic fanaticism.

The Calas and Sirven families are the two most famous cases in which Voltaire interfered.

But in not a few other cases he played the rôle of rescuer, without attracting attention.

Thus in 1764 he succeeded in freeing Claude Chaumont who was on the galley bench because he had committed the crime of attending a Protestant service. The Duke de Choiseul interfered, but he could not free nearly as many as he wished, because he had to consider the Minister of the Royal House, the Count de Saint-Florentin whose orthodoxy was proof against every test. But Voltaire succeeded in freeing the Protestant Paul Achard who had spent nineteen years in the galleys, and Jean Pierre Espinas who had spent twenty-three years there because he had given lodging to a Protestant clergyman for one night. All Espinas' property had been confiscated, with the exception of one third, which was divided among his relatives. After his liberation Voltaire succeeded in negotiating the award of a pension to his family, equivalent to the interest on his former fortune. The last Huguenots in the galleys for attending a Protestant ceremony were not freed until the next reign, in 1775, when Voltaire's pupil Turgot had become Minister.

19

The trial of Calas was still going on when another case of the same sort came up. Voltaire had now become the unofficial Bureau of Appeal to which all complaints against judicial fanaticism and unfairness were brought.

The Sirven family was suffering the same accusation as the Calas family, and an attempt was being made to connect the two cases to convince the population that the Protestants made a practice of murdering all of their children who turned to Catholicism. The fact that the innocence of the Sirven family was obvious to everybody with any common sense did not make the matter any easier for Voltaire. On the contrary, the case presented such great difficulties that the acquittal of Sirven required nine years, while the vindication of Calas had taken only three.

Pierre Paul Sirven, of the city of Castres, belonged to one of the most prominent families of the Province. He was married and had three daughters. His

profession was that of a surveyor and feudiste, e.g., he was charged with keeping in order the feudal lists, in which the inventory and the taxes of the manor lords were recorded. The eldest daughter had married a certain Périer; Elisabeth and Jeanne were unmarried.

On March 6, 1760, the daughter Elisabeth, who was a little deficient mentally, disappeared suddenly from the house. The day passed in a vain search. In the evening her father was summoned to the Bishop at Castres, who informed him that Elisabeth had confided to him her wish to change her religion and that consequently he had sent her to the convent of the Black Ladies, so that she might be given the teachings she craved so much. The father knew at once that his daughter must have acted under the influence of a zealous sister of the Bishop. But he answered with great self-restraint that he had never had an inkling of Elisabeth's desire to be converted to the Catholic faith. Naturally, such a desire hurt him, but he did not believe he had any right to oppose it; for he knew that she had come into good hands.

The stay in the convent made the condition of the feeble-minded young girl still worse; soon she showed signs of complete mental derangement. She had delusions, spoke to angels; in her mania of asceticism she tore all the clothing from her body, asked to be flogged to do penance. The servant-maid at the convent accommodated her with several lashes, and then she did not want any more. Her condition improved so little that at the Bishop's order she was sent back home, after a stay of seven months in the convent. On her body she showed traces of the lashes. Spells of madness became more frequent and sometimes developed into such furious outbursts that it was found necessary to guard her or tie her down.

But when this became known, it was interpreted as mistreatment and an unjust curbing of her liberty, and the Black Ladies therefore reported Sirven to the Intendant of the Province so that he received the order to let his daughter visit the church and the Black Ladies in the convent. Feeling the threat of danger in advance, Sirven at once declared that if

his daughter was to be given religious instruction, he asked that she be taken back to the convent; he would not put any obstacles in the way of her changing her religion. But after an examination by physicians, the authorities in Castres refused this.

In July, 1761, the Sirvens moved to Saint-Abby, fifty miles from Castres, where Sirven was to work for a Monsieur d'Esperandieu, who had prepared an apartment for him and his family. More than a quarter of a year passed quietly. But one day, early in November, the Abbé Bel, Curate at Aignes-Fondes, entered the apartment, called Elisabeth and commanded her mother to leave her daughter full freedom to go to the church of Saint-Pierre de Frontze to hear Mass and take her instruction in religion. Madame Sirven answered that she had never thought of resisting Elisabeth's religious vocation, but that for certain practical reasons, which she would name to the Abbé later, she did not believe it advisable to let her daughter go alone that far.

When Sirven came home, he was frightened at the possible significance of this visit. He went to the curate, who informed him that he had merely been acting at the order of the parish priest. But Sirven sensed a conspiracy, and said so frankly to the curate; he made up his mind that upon his return on December 16, he would take his daughter Elisabeth to the Bishop at once.

He called upon Abbé Bel to tell him his intentions and to learn whether he had not received an order concerning him. Then they went to the château where they had supper with Monsieur and Madame d'Esperandieu and the family. A Monsieur Carcenac came during the dessert and left with the Abbé at eleven o'clock. Sirven remained for another three-quarters of an hour to look through some documents, with Madame d'Esperandieu, and then was conducted by a servant to the bedroom situated next to the living-room. He got up the next morning at seven o'clock and waited in the living-room for the lady of the house, who wanted to ask him to do an errand in Castres. About one hour had passed when a messenger from Saint-Abby informed him that his

daughter Elisabeth had vanished in the middle of the night, and that nobody had any idea of her whereabouts.

Sirven set out at once and arrived before ten o'clock in Saint-Abby. His wife was so sick with anxiety that she could scarcely speak, and one of those present had to tell him the events of the previous night: between twelve and one o'clock Elisabeth had gotten up, had gone through her mother's bedroom and to her question had replied that she wanted to get some wood. She did not return. Her sister Jeanne looked for her in vain. From the people living in the basement it was learned that the house door had been unlocked and that someone had gone out.

Sirven spent several days in trying vainly to find his daughter. Finally the family concluded that she must have gone back to the Black Ladies and was in hiding in the convent.

On January 3, 1762, Sirven had gone on business to Burlats, when he was called back to Saint-Abby by the news that some children, who had been bird-nesting with straw torches, had dropped several burning straws into the well, and by their light had seen a body down in it. The next morning a messenger was sent to Mazamet where Trinquier the Procureur of the town lived. This Procureur was a petty merchant who had been in bad circumstances and who had been elected a magistrate.

Trinquier was proud of his dignified position, but not so proud that he would not obey every hint that was given him from above. And there was no lack in such hints. And the authorities in Toulouse were anxious to confirm the suspicion against the Calas family by a further example of Protestant murder of apostate children.

In the beginning nobody doubted that the mentally defective young girl had jumped into the well. From January 6 to 10 all inhabitants of the village were questioned and of forty-five witnesses not one was unfavorable to the Sirven family. Then somebody voiced the suspicion that Elisabeth Sirven had become the martyr of her inclination to the Catholic

faith, and at once the suspicion grew. The Calas case spread the contagion. The supreme authority, Landes, did not want to be outdone by David de Beaudrigue and he received from the prosecutor-general in Toulouse a written request to proceed unsparingly against the Sirven family.

As the girl's father proved that he spent the evening and the night at the château with Monsieur d'Esperandieu, he could not possibly have thrown his daughter into the well himself. The sixty-three-year-old mother was small and weak, and the eldest daughter was pregnant. Elisabeth was unusually tall and strong. The female members of the family could not possibly have dragged her to the well, at least not without anyone's hearing a sound; but the inmates of the house had heard no struggle, and they could be positive that one person only went out of the door. This must have been Elisabeth as neither the mother nor one of the daughters could have sneaked out with the body.

As the Procureur Trinquier simply wished to impose a sentence on the family, he did not consider these circumstances. He took care not to summon any witnesses who could establish Sirven's alibi, and none who could testify as to the quiet at Sirven's house. Seventeen witnesses were questioned who gave credible evidence regarding Sirven's alibi as well as Elisabeth's insanity. As several more hearings were to take place on January 20, Trinquier tried to secure an order for the arrest of Sirven.

Landes would not agree to this at once; but he yielded when it became known that the lawyer Jalabert had offered money to the physicians who had performed the autopsy, if they would let him have their opinion. Trinquier considered this a proof of guilt, although the verdict of the physicians had long been filed and could not have been changed by the information. On January 19 the warrant for arrest was issued.

20

As soon as Madame Sirven heard about it she and her daughters hastened to Castres to warn her hus-

band, as the mounted police had been ordered to arrest all four.

Knowing that he was innocent Sirven took the news very calmly; but well-meaning friends advised him of the necessity of fleeing to escape the threatened arrest.

All four slipped away in the middle of the night, in rain and darkness, on roads on which they bogged and slipped in the mud. After five hours they came to Roquecombe, only a mile away.

The greatest hardship to the unhappy family was the necessity of separating so they would remain unrecognized. Sirven at first hid for three days in a dairy belonging to a nobleman he knew. On learning that immediately after his flight a squad of horsemen had appeared at his house and confiscated all property, he felt he was no longer safe there; he fled up the mountains which belonged to the Arétat estate, three miles from Castres, and remained there a month.

Fearing to fall into the hands of the police, his family set out and after six days reached Monredon, which lay still nearer to Castres than Arétat. Here they decided that safety demanded that the women, too, flee separately. The old mother slipped away by one road; the eldest daughter, whose pregnancy had by then advanced considerably, took another, and the young Jeanne took a third. By detours they reached Nîmes. Thence they rode on horseback over difficult mountain trails again making detours in order not to be caught, crossing the Rouergue mountains and the Cevennes. One can get some idea of the hardships which they suffered on reading that the pregnant Marie-Anne fell from her horse eleven times during the two and a half months the journey took.

Sirven himself, who had taken refuge in the rocky region, received there daily alarming news. He resolved to set out again in order to cross the borders of France. In the severest season of the year he wandered over the snow of the Rouergue and Velay mountains, crossed the border, reached Geneva and arrived in Lausanne in the beginning of April. It

was not until June that his wife and two daughters met him there.

The wretched provincial court issued against the unfortunate family a first monitory, which without any regard for the special circumstances seemed to have been copied word for word from that against the Calas family; then a second, and then a third. The judge in Mazamet was even so bold as to ask the lawyer Jalabert why he, who was of Catholic faith, defended a case which was just the contrary of this faith.

Jalabert could not have foreseen that so much fuss would be made over his trifling carelessness in offering money to the physicians for their opinion. Indeed the physicians themselves considered his request very innocent; afterward they invited him to lunch and when he declined they drank wine with him; they saw in his proposal nothing more than curiosity and zeal for his clients.

In addition to the very minor piece of evidence furnished by this offer, there were two more. One was the verdict of the physicians in which originally nothing was said about the cause of death; but later upon request, it was added that Elisabeth had been strangled before being thrown into the well. This they tried to prove by the circumstance that no water was found either in the stomach or in the intestinal tract. The Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier commented scornfully on this report, that the very findings which it reported were conclusive evidence that Elisabeth had not been strangled, but had found her death in the well; the Faculty accused the court physicians of gross ignorance, as they did not know how the question of drowning should be decided, namely, looking for water in the wind-pipe and lungs; for drowning is caused by suffocation, resulting from inhaling water instead of air. The unfortunate part about it was that the physicians had not even sinned out of ignorance, but out of their "readiness to serve," as one of them, a certain Gallet-Duplessis, later frankly admitted. He had given his opinion against his better knowledge.

The third piece of evidence was the unexplained

disappearance of the body. It had been left in a room of the city hall. In the night of January 5 and 6, 1762, the body disappeared. It was concluded that Sirven had caused its removal—which was nonsense, because it would have been buried in a few days and because the verdict of the physicians had been long on record.

Even assuming the nearly impossible, that Sirven, from the distance at which he was hiding, had succeeded in having it removed, the most that could be inferred was that he wished to avoid a burial in the Catholic cemetery. Which again was foolish, because he had voluntarily given his consent to his daughter's change of faith.

Now the same technical legal errors were made as in the Calas trial: only accusing witnesses were allowed to testify; in the same way the monitories clearly named the persons against whom evidence was sought; and a number of unprovable assumptions were put down as facts. The hearings took so long that they were concluded only in February, 1763; and Trinquier let the case drag on for another full year before he moved in court to have Sirven broken upon the wheel, then burned alive, and his ashes scattered to the winds. He asked that Madame Sirven should be hanged and both daughters should attend the execution of their parents; after which they should be exiled.

The decision lay with Landes. He declared the defendants guilty. In one hour he examined the evidence of several hundred witnesses and pronounced the sentence. The defendants were sentenced on March 19, 1764, although they were absent. Sirven was not to be broken upon the wheel and burned, but hanged instead. His wife was to be hanged likewise. The daughters were to attend their parents' death on the scaffold. The flight of the family was regarded by Landes as a confession of their guilt.

Voltaire addressed him: "You wretch, did you perhaps suppose they would stay there and let you exercise your mad fury on them?"

A sentence given in the absence of the accused did not require ratification by the Parliament, because

those thus sentenced were not permitted to appeal. The Parliament simply delegated the lower court to carry out the sentence. This was done on September 11, 1764. In the market place in Mazamet two dummies, representing Sirven and his wife, were hanged on the scaffold. The two daughters looked on at the execution, in the form of two more dummies.

Legally, however, it was made to look as though the Parliament had not confirmed the sentence of the lower court. Voltaire in his contempt for this sophistry wrote to Elie de Beaumont (September 26, 1765): "To issue a permit for the dishonoring of a man and the confiscation of his fortune, that's not a sentence, oh no! The decision of the lower court must seem to the Parliament either just or unjust. In ordering the execution it ratifies either something just or something unjust."

21

As soon as the Sirven family was on Swiss territory it was introduced to Voltaire. About this he wrote three years later to Damilaville (March 1, 1765): "Imagine four lambs accused by the butchers of having devoured another lamb. So much misfortune and innocence cannot be described."

As first, Voltaire dared not help the family in any other way than by putting his time and his purse at its disposal. Otherwise it would have been impossible for him to bring the Calas affair to a happy end. If these cases should be repeated too often, the Catholic public could easily become convinced that there was some truth in this rumor that the Protestants were infanticides. Also the sympathy for both families might lessen; for the Calas because the wrong done them was no longer a unique case, and for the Sirven because none of them had actually been imprisoned or hanged.

In the meantime he was content to contribute, generously as always, to the support of the poor people who had been bereft of all their means by French Jurisprudence.

Many critics jeered at Voltaire for the zeal he had shown some time before at building up a fortune and later at keeping it intact, while at the same time, he gave away the profits from all of his books as well as all his income from the theater. They should have considered how useful it was for the human race that a fortune which was used only for the best purposes, for once in history should come into the hands of a writer of unchallenged greatness, who did not have to cringe for the favor of a royal patron. Instead of having to be silent before his contemporaries for fear of forfeiting a wretched pension, he stood guard not only protected by his pen, but also giving numerous unfortunates and victims of injustice, refuge, food, clothing and a chance to work themselves up again.

This time the difficulties Voltaire met were tremendous. There was nothing to take hold of in the Sirven case. Voltaire risked the reputation he had won as the defender of Calas, should he suffer defeat, and how could this be avoided? All of those who hated him, and hated him doubly for his latest triumph, lay in wait for him to destroy him and the effect of his former victory.

The general public was apathetic. If its interest was to be awakened at least a few members of the house Sirven had to be sent back to be broken upon the wheel or hanged. It came to this: they had all been sentenced in their absence, and in order to have their case taken up again and their innocence established, they had first to surrender themselves to the court in Mazamet and then to the Parliament of Toulouse. The latter, to avenge itself for the disgrace it had suffered by the justification of Calas and his entire family, would surely have had all of the Sirvens broken upon the wheel or hanged. If anything was to be attained, Voltaire had to succeed in bringing the case before a different court.

22

When he began negotiations with the Parliament of Toulouse, he spoke as one power to another. He

would let the Sirvens appear there only on the condition that the court should be open to conviction on the subject of their innocence. When the Parliament agreed to commit itself on this point, he had a petition presented to the Vice-Chancellor. The latter held out the prospect of a pardon. But a pardon was not what Voltaire was seeking. He wanted justice.

Voltaire's friends in Paris were enlisted once more. Elie de Beaumont again promised to draw up a petition. Then all the Protestants in France gathered about Voltaire who undertook to "put all Europe to work on the Sirven affair." He induced Sirven himself to write his own account. Voltaire sent it to Elie de Beaumont with the words: "The innocence of the Sirven family is even clearer than that of the Calas family: there is not the slightest indication of any guilt here. One is ashamed to be a member of the human species when, in the same country, one sees one place giving comic operas while in another fanaticism presses the sword into the executioner's hand."

Elie de Beaumont sent Voltaire a whole packet of questions which he wished answered. It was not easy to get answers from Sirven. He did not know much about his trial, not having been present at it, and he was not especially clever and had become vague and confused by his misfortune. His property had been confiscated, his eldest daughter had broken down completely under her hardships. His wife, whose life was shortened by the persecutions, had died in the spring of 1765.

The thing to be done first of all, as in the other trial, was to get a look at the documents of the case. After some efforts copies of the documents of the court in Mazamet were obtained. But the Parliament of Toulouse flatly refused to give a copy. At first Voltaire thought of registering a formal protest in Toulouse, to be able more easily to have the case removed to another court, which would order the Parliament to surrender a copy of the decision. He abandoned this, however, in view of the danger involved.

Finally, after two years of perseverance, Voltaire came—it is unknown how, perhaps by bribery—into the possession of a copy.

Again the fiery and impatient man had to sit back and see how efficiently the French judicial system could waste time. He had based high hopes on the petition of Elie de Beaumont. But the latter did not hurry himself unduly at drafting it. He saw that the public had lost interest in religious trials, and as there was no glory in it for him, he took his time about it.

In January, 1766, Voltaire finally received an outline of the petition and read it with the greatest satisfaction; he sent for Sirven to come and see it, and, as, he wrote to the lawyer, for a moment he was afraid that Sirven's tears of joy would efface the script. In a letter to Beaumont he had called the latter's petition for Calas "a work of eloquence," but this outline was "the masterpiece of a genius." He wrote to d'Argental (February 10, 1766): "This case moves my whole soul. Tragedies, comedies and theaters mean nothing to me. The time goes so slowly. I wish that Elie's petition were already published, so that all Europe might resound."

But Elie de Beaumont's phlegmatic attitude was a strong contrast to Voltaire's fiery spirit. For reasons which became clear much later, he did not care to get his petition ready for the printer, and it was now up to Voltaire to console and encourage Sirven, while at the same time he had to be careful not to let Beaumont notice his impatience; if the lawyer were offended there was the danger that he might drop the affair entirely, and they would have to start all over again with a new, less famous advocate.

23

In the meantime he tried to secure influential protectors for Sirven. Grimm gave him a list of those who could be won in Germany. Voltaire wrote to the Count of Hessen-Cassel, the Margravine of Baden, the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, the Princess of Darmstadt, the Princess of Nassau-Saarbrücken, all of whom sent him sums of money. Madame Geoffrin, who had gone to visit Stanislaw Poniatowski in Var-

shaw, sent 200 ducats from the Polish King to the Sirven family. The Empress Catherine sent a considerable sum and wrote: "Woe to the persecutors!" Frederick the Great sent a money gift and offered to give the family a residence in Prussia. Christian VII of Denmark sent a letter enclosing a round sum.

Hoping that Elie de Beaumont's petition would shortly be going to press, Voltaire enclosed in the letters to those whose interest he was trying to solicit, a little article *Avis au public sur les parricides imputés aux Calas et aux Sirven.* He was already confident of victory when he was struck an unexpected blow in the form of a new and still more terrible case. Now he had to doubt his ability to bring the case of Sirven to a happy conclusion.

On July 1, 1766, the young Chevalier de La Barre was broken upon the wheel in the market place in Abbeville, on a charge of blasphemy.

XI

THE FLAME OVER EUROPE

1

VOLTAIRE was well aware that his name was anathema to the Calvinists, and for his part he despised them for their narrowness. But the fact that his name shone like a flame all over Europe and that the Protestants in France had no other protector, caused a general pilgrimage of Protestant clergymen to Ferney.

The first thing the unfortunate Chaumont, whom Voltaire had freed from the galleys, wished to do, was to call upon his savior and thank him. His crime had been to attend a Protestant service. A Protestant clergyman who took him to Voltaire has described the scene for us.

"I told him that I had brought along a little man who wanted to throw himself at his feet to thank him for his liberation from the galleys, and that it was Chaumont whom I had waiting in the anteroom and for whom I asked admittance. At the name Chaumont Monsieur de Voltaire rang at once. Never did I see such a funny and at the same time enjoyable sight.—'What, you poor, brave man, you were sent to the galleys for the crime of having prayed to God in wicked French (not Latin)?' He called several people, who were at his house, to see the poor Chaumont who, though neatly dressed considering his circumstances, was quite confused to see himself being made so much of. Even the ex-Jesuit whom Voltaire had taken into his home (Father Adam) congratulated Chaumont."

At the same time, Voltaire was in bad repute with the Jansenists of the Parliaments. After his defense of the Calas family he had become the object of the bitter hatred of the Parliaments. The Parliament of Paris had Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* burned by the hangman.

More dangerous than his repudiation of the concept of "the Revelation" in the *Dictionnaire* proved his allusions to the Parliament; for instance, in the article entitled "Tyrant" he said "It is better to have to do with a single tyrant than with a whole flock of little tyrants."—The Parliament took this as applying to itself.

Following the suggestion of the Attorney General, the Parliament had ordered an investigation to determine the author of the *Dictionnaire*. Voltaire, having been forewarned that "from all sides the thunderstorm against the *Dictionnaire* was gathering," had quickly denied his authorship, which, of course, was a mere formality, as all of France knew the truth.

In the trial of La Barre which was now commencing, the *Dictionnaire* both in its unabridged form as well as in the shorter *Le Portatif*, was used as weapon against Voltaire and his followers.

2

In the night of August 8 to 9, 1765, a wooden crucifix which stood on the Pont-Neuf in Abbeville had been damaged by several blows of a stick, and at the same time a cross in the cemetery Sainte-Cathérine had been smeared with dirt. The little town got wildly excited. Anger was universal. An investigation was instituted to determine the perpetrators of these blasphemies and a monitory issued in the interest of the investigation.

The clergy and authorities asked the Bishop of Amiens, Louis de la Motte, to come to Abbeville to do penance with them, to ward off the wrath of Heaven. Barefoot and with a cord around his neck, the Bishop headed the procession which was attended by the entire town.

The day after the procession, which had caused wild excitement, the second bill of indictment for the incident was filed, based on the testimony of a certain Belleval, member of the revenue board of Abbeville; in it the godless language said to have been used by three (so far unnamed) young men was rebuked;

they were charged with having passed the procession on the Corpus Christi Day without genuflection or obeisance. On August 26, warrants were issued for the arrest of the Messieurs de La Barre, d'Etallonde and Moisnel. D'Etallonde had wisely fled long before.

Jean François Lefevbre, Chevalier de La Barre, was the son of a lieutenant-general, who had run through the family fortune and afforded his son only a mediocre education. As a half-grown youth he had come to Abbeville where a relative, the Abbess of Willancourt, Madame de Brou, had taken an interest in him, given him an education and tried to procure him a company of cavalry. He lived outside of the abbey, but had his meals with his aunt, at the table of the Abbess. He introduced to her his friends who were members of the most prominent families. The young people indulged in merry and sometimes reckless language, which by no means offended the Abbess, but rather entertained her.

In the excellent work by Edward Hertz: *Voltaire and French criminal jurisdiction in the eighteenth century,* the author, who studied all the documents of these trials, enlarges upon No. IX, and writes:

"Belleval, who is said to have had love affair with the Abbess, but at any rate played a prominent rôle in the salon of the gay lady, was by and by supplanted by La Barre and was no longer invited to the parties of the Abbess. When he bitterly complained of this to La Barre, the latter insulted him in the open street. The injury to the crucifix furnished a good opportunity for him to take revenge on the Chevalier."

Belleval went about everywhere, questioning servants and common people mostly to learn discreditable things about La Barre, and as he reminded everybody that it was a sacred public duty to tell whatever one suspected, as the monitory demanded, he soon found that La Barre's name was connected with the irreverence that had been shown to the procession on Corpus Christi Day.

Moisnel, only sixteen or seventeen years old, was suspected of having been with La Barre and d'Etallonde when they passed the procession; he, too, had

not kneeled, but he had carried his hat under his arm. The only thing he confessed at the outset about his companions was their indifference toward the holy procession.

At the second hearing the boy had been so frightened by his stay in jail and the possibility of his being executed that he mixed everything up and implicated himself and his companions in the greatest detail. For in the meantime Belleval, who was his guardian, had gained admission to the prison, reproached him for his previous reserve, and incited him to inform against La Barre.

Now Moisnel very much repented his transgression; he had always been very religious. He accused La Barre of having spit at pictures of the Saints, charged La Barre and d'Etallonde with having sung a certain obscene song called *La Madeleine*, and admitted that he himself had joined in the singing of similar songs, whose stanzas he even recited from memory for the court record.

He confessed that La Barre had loaned him Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques* as well as the poem *Epître à Uranie*. About d'Etallonde, he stated that he had seen him striking the crucifix on the bridge with his cane; it was also he who had sullied the cross in the cemetery. Moisnel begged forgiveness for having failed to confess all this at the first hearing. Meanwhile, two more young men whom Moisnel had accused of having sung obscene songs, had saved themselves by fleeing.

3

It would be painful to mention all the youthful frivolities of word and deed with which La Barre was charged by a whole mob of witnesses, and to which he finally succumbed. They concern ugly phrases about sacred matters.

La Barre admitted that he and d'Etallonde had passed the procession with their hats on. But in this they had no intention of committing any blasphemy; they had merely been anxious not to offend the Ab-

bess by being late to dinner. When he was told that it would not have taken much time to take off his hat and kneel, he admitted that perhaps he had not acted properly.

That he had spoken ill of the holy Virgin, La Barre admitted was possible; but he must have been drunk. The irreverent words he was charged with using might perhaps be from *La Pucelle* and *Epître à Uranie,* which were ascribed to Monsieur de Voltaire. He admitted having sung at a carousal the obscene songs mentioned by Moisnel; he also confessed that he had recited Piron's *Ode à Priape,* and that he had knelt ceremoniously before several frivolous and godless books on his bookshelf, saying that this should be done on passing the tabernacle. This, however, had been done in jest. He stoutly denied having had any part in the sullying of the cross in the cemetery or the defacing of the crucifix. After having declared at first that he knew nothing about who the real perpetrator was, he confessed that d'Etallonde had told him one day when he had called on him to borrow his hunting pistol, that he had struck the crucifix several times with his scabbard.

But his library proved to be his undoing, for in France at that time, people were punished for the books they possessed, on unfair assumption that a man's books betrayed the exact way of thinking of their owner. Now it was revealed that La Barre had possessed books which either ignored or attacked the Church: Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique,* Helvetius' *De l'Esprit* and several others, as well as various of the frivolous books of that time, such as *Thérèse Philosophe, Le Portier des Chartreux, La Religieuse en Chemise,* etc., which according to a modern conception was not only no mortal sin but was no business of the state's whatsoever. His very sensible relative, Madame de Brou, realized into what great danger these books could bring her darling, and had ordered that they should be burned, immediately after his arrest; but a monk by the name of Schmid was mischievous enough not to carry out the order. He saved out various frivolous novels as *Le Sultan*

Misopouf et la Princesse Grisemine, Le Cousin de Mahomet, etc., and also Voltaire's *Le Portatif.*

Actually La Barre did not touch any crucifix, and there is nothing in any part of the *Dictionnaire* which might have incited him to do so. Thus it is plain that the judges had not read the work. Otherwise they would know in what tone it speaks of Jesus.

The next sensation of the trial was when, toward the end of the inquiry, the poor boy Moisnel took back all his accusations and denunciations, and declared that he had given this evidence under the pressure of a moral suasion used upon him by the court (that is Belleval).

4

The sentence of February 28, 1766, was that d'Etallonde was guilty *in contumaciam* of "having passed in a contemptuous way, at a distance of twenty-five feet, with covered head, and without kneeling, a procession which carried the holiest sacrament; and furthermore that he had tried to buy, from a certain Beauvarlet, a crucifix of plaster, in order that he might break it to pieces and step on it with his feet; and further that he had committed shocking blasphemies and sung two disgraceful songs which mock at God, the Holy Virgin and certain Saints; and finally that he had struck the crucifix erected on the Pont-Neuf." As a penalty for all this he was sentenced to do public penance before the main portal of St. Wulfram's church. Around his neck he should wear the inscription: "Damned and despised Blasphemer and violator." Thereafter his tongue should be torn out, his hand cut off, and he should be burned alive. His ashes were to be strewn to the four winds, and all his goods confiscated.

As he had fled, all this should be done with an effigy of him.

La Barre was declared to have been found guilty of having passed, with studied and deliberate contempt, with covered head and without kneeling, a procession which carried the holiest sacrament; besides

which he had most shockingly taken in vain the name of God, sneered at the Holy Communion, the Holy Virgin, religion, the commandments of God and of the church; further, he had sung the two blasphemous songs mentioned in the documents, and by his own confession had worshiped the foul and infamous books on his bookshelf, even prayed to them while kneeling, and had made the sign of the cross while uttering obscenities.

Therefore he, too, must do public penance before the main portal of the church; then his tongue was to be torn out and he was to be beheaded in the market place. His head and body were to be thrown on a pyre and burned to ashes. Before the execution, he was to undergo the ordinary and extraordinary torture, so that the truth might be had out of him. His belongings were to be confiscated. The *Dictionnaire Philosophique* found in his room was to be thrown on the same pyre on which the body was burned.

In the Parliament of Paris, before which the case had to come next, La Barre had a kinsman, the President d'Ormesson. He had read the documents of the trial and remarked that the confirmation of the sentence was impossible; the lawyers should simply refrain from filing petitions for the defendant; for this would only give rise to gossip and discussion; the matter had to be disposed of very quietly.

It seems that d'Ormesson was a scoundrel. Under ecclesiastical influence he succeeded in preventing all steps in favor of La Barre. The affair proceeded in all secrecy, and the public which might perhaps have expressed, by some agitation, its anger at the senselessness of the trial, remained silent. The assessor, Pelliot, however, moved for dismissal—because of the youth of the defendant and the "circumstances of the case."

But then the Councillor of the Parliament, Pasquier, got up and demanded the confirmation of the verdict of Abbeville. It was imperative, he said, to put some stop to the increasingly bold godlessness which was proceeding from the more recent philosophy. It was the fault of a man who was recognized

leader of the *philosophes* and consequently the real perpetrator of the sacrilege committed in Abbeville, and this man's name was Voltaire. Pasquier implored the Parliament to set an example.

He said: the high assemblage should do this in its own interest; for the Parliament had recently shown its hostility toward the Jesuits and the higher clergy who were connected with them, and hence it ought to seize this opportunity to show its zeal for religion.

The orator was effective, and his eloquence changed the votes of a considerable number of members. The Attorney-General Guillaume Joly de Fleury talked in vain against the confirmation of the barbaric sentence. On June 4, 1766, it was confirmed by fifteen against ten votes. As the signing of the sentence was delayed for six days, it would seem as though a Royal pardon was expected. The pious Louis, however, had no intention of letting the heavenly powers go unavenged.

5

La Barre was taken in a mail coach from Paris to Abbeville to be mutilated and executed. A roundabout was taken, as they were on the lookout for interference, and the coach was driven slowly in order to give the courier who perhaps was bringing the reprieve, a chance to overtake the coach. But there was no interference, nor was there any reprieve.

The nineteen-year-old youth died like a hero and kept his courage and dignity to the last. As his confessor he was given a Dominican monk whom he had often met at the abbey of Madame de Brou. Before he was called to the torture and execution, La Barre asked him to sit with him at the table, eat his half chicken and drank his bottle of wine. "Now we must drink coffee," he said calmly to Father Bosquier, "which will not keep me from getting to sleep."

On his last walk, to the place of execution, he was hurt by the fact that in the immense crowd which had come to enjoy the spectacle, he recognized many acquaintances, with a look of lustful anticipation in

their eyes. He said: "The worst part about this day for me is that I can see people in the windows whom I believed to be my friends."

When he was led before the portal of the St. Wulfram's, he refused most decidedly to do the public penance, and it was found necessary to let another go through the ceremony for him. At this point the executioner's henchmen were supposed to tear out his tongue. But he threatened to resist so desperately that they were content to make a pretense of having torn it out. With the same firm resolute bearing he walked to the scaffold. When he ascended the steps, he lost one of his slippers. In spite of the fetters that held his arms and legs, he descended again and put it back on his foot. When he arrived at the scaffold he said: "I would never have believed that the life of a young nobleman would be taken for such trumperies."

Five executioners from five different cities had been summoned. One of them approached him to cut his hair. "What for?" said La Barre, "do they want to make me a choir-boy?"

When he saw the sword of the executioner, by which his head was to fall, he said: "Is your weapon a good one? Was it you who cut off the head of Count de Lally?"—"Yes, Monsieur!"—"But you missed him!"—"He held himself badly. Assume a correct position and I shall not miss you."—"Don't worry, I shall keep still and not be childish."

He had already borne the ordinary and extraordinary torture, and had stubbornly denied what it was especially wanted that he should confess, namely, his complicity in the defacing of the crucifix on the bridge. He remained firm to the last moment, tied the bandage over the eyes for himself, and lay in such a position as to make easy the work of the executioner. When the executioner cut off the head he was rewarded by general applause from the crowd and from all the windows.

The body, together with Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique Portatif*, was burned to ashes and strewn to the winds.

After La Barre's execution, the other defendants, whose sentence had merely been suspended, were in

the greatest danger. But as the trial had been illegal in many points, the lawyer Linguet got out a petition on their behalf, and seven other prominent lawyers signed the document with him. This document asserted that (1) neither Duval de Soicourt nor Broutel should have been permitted to act as judges, (2) that the warrant of October 8, 1765, was illegal, and (3) that, as Moisnel had retracted his confession, there was no proof of the defendant's guilt.—When the Parliament of Paris threatened to take action against the eight lawyers and upbraided them severely, the entire legal profession lined up with their eight colleagues and threatened to resign from the bar. Frightened, the Parliament refrained from its intention. But Linguet's petition made no impression upon the public. For only a few copies had got into circulation before the Parliament bought up the entire edition and suppressed it. This is why the trial of La Barre attracted scarcely any attention in Paris, but in Abbeville, after reading the petition of Linguet, it was found best to dismiss Moisnel and the others who had sung obscene songs.

6

La Barre's execution threw Voltaire into the greatest excitement. On July 12 he wrote to d'Argental in such a way that the censor would not understand him; "My heart is torn; I have no use for a Felix who selects the most refined and inhuman tortures for the execution of a Polyeucte and Nearch (Corneille's *Polyeucte*). . . . There are play-goers who positively cannot bear such plays."

It struck Voltaire that he had been burned in effigy on the pyre which had consumed the body of poor La Barre. There was no telling what might happen to him if the Parliament should get him in its clutches. What a coup it would be if he could be arrested and a trial for blasphemy or the like could be instituted against him! What a triumph it would be for the Parliament to get hold of the very foun-

tain-head of freethinking and to give it a death-blow in his person.

He had taken refuge at the baths near Rolle, in Switzerland; he always felt uneasy on French soil and he was seriously thinking not only of leaving France himself, but also of persuading the most prominent men of the philosophical party to do the same. He wanted to induce d'Alembert, Diderot, Holbach and Damilaville, and he turned to his former protector Frederick the Great for a refuge. The latter answered in July: "I am astonished to see from your letter that you are thinking of choosing another place of retirement than Switzerland, and that you are considering the region near Cleve. This asylum is always open for you. How could I refuse this to a man who contributes so much to the honor of literature, his country, the human race, his century! You can travel without exertion from Switzerland to Cleve; if you go abroad in Basle you can make the journey in two weeks without leaving your bed."

D'Alembert, who had kept Voltaire informed about the whole trial and who had told him that even the Papal Nutius was aroused by the barbaric sentence which would be inconceivable even to the Inquisition in Rome, had also written that he did not want to think about the whole matter any more.

But before he received this letter Voltaire had written to d'Alembert: "I cannot understand how thinking individuals can live in a country which is inhabited by monkeys which so often turn into tigers. I, for my part, am ashamed to live even on the border. Truly the moment has now come to break one's fetters, and to carry the impression of the horror with which one is filled to another place . . . there is no more time for jesting; jokes do not go with murderous deeds. . . . Is it the home of philosophy and of pleasure? It is the land of the massacre of St. Bartholomew!"

Frederick who had been called Luc for so long a time in Voltaire's correspondence now once more becomes brother Frederick. His letter of August 7 and September 13 are worth reading. He envies his

nephew, the Duke of Brunswig, who had called upon Voltaire in Ferney and had heard him talk. He discusses the plan of a philosopher's colony in Cleve. They shall be welcome, but they must not expect to find woods, for these were cut and burned by their country-men, the French. And they must be peaceful and tolerant, not hurt the faith of the natives, as they, too, wish to enjoy full freedom. "The average man does not deserve to be enlightened. . . . If the philosophers were to form a government, the people would after a hundred and fifty years forge some new superstition, and would either pray to little idols or to the graves in which the great men are buried, or invoke the sun or commit some similar nonsense. Superstition is a weakness of the human mind, which is inseparably tied up with it; it has always existed and will always exist." The penalties in Abbeville had been barbaric; Frederick would make the penalty fit the crime. If one were to deface a statue he would sentence him to restore or replace it. If a man were convicted of reading Voltaire's works, he should be sentenced to study the *Summa Theologica* (eight volumes) of St. Thomas Aquinas. The frivolous sinner would thus probably be punished more severely than La Barre had been; for tediousness lasts a century, death only a moment.

Voltaire's plan was not successful. D'Alembert was not willing to leave Paris, and in vain did Voltaire send similar suggestions to Diderot.

But Diderot had just as little desire to leave Paris as d'Alembert and all the others whom Voltaire approached. Of course, they were not exposed to the vengeance of the opposing party as he was, but that was not the main cause.

Voltaire's nature was peculiar. He was now wholly the soldier, and the site of his camp must depend entirely upon the most favorable strategic conditions.

There is something sublime about the way in which, without regard to his feat of exposing himself to arrest, he gives his whole soul to his great aim, the spiritual emancipation of the human race. It is sad to note how, from the moment he lost the "respectable Emily" he became indifferent to women, social inter-

course with his friends, his surroundings, even the colony he had founded and developed. He could love, no matter where it might be. Nothing tied him.

He loved no more women, and was loved by none; living always near Geneva, he had grown accustomed to having all his friends in Paris, at such a distance that it was a greater journey than it is now from Geneva to New York. He had to become accustomed to doing without Paris, without France, bitter as it must have been. Where he himself was, there Paris was; there was France.

He now was a center in himself. The others had to stay in Paris, the intellectual center. He himself was not tied by any woman on earth. But how could have Diderot done without Sophie Volland, the joy of his life, whom he loved, and who loved him; and how could have d'Alembert done without Julie de Lespinasse, whom he loved and who he naïvely imagined loved him! As d'Alembert had refused all of the great Frederick's entreaties to come to him and conduct his Academy, he refused now the invitation of Catherine II to come to Petersburg to tutor the future Paul I, with a yearly income of sixty thousand francs.

These men neither could tear nor wished to tear themselves away from that Paris from which Voltaire was barred. They therefore had to listen to bitter words from Voltaire. "Certain monsters," he says, "are allowed to go on living for the sole reason that the Hercules who could exterminate them are unwilling to tear themselves away from their little lady-friends."

7

In his tribute to Voltaire, Frederick the Great says: "He would have awakened the Chevalier de La Barre from the dead, had he possessed the gift of performing miracles. How splendid it is that a philosopher makes his voice heard from his refuge, and that the human race, whose spokesman he is, then forces the judges to revise an unjust sentence. If nothing else spoke in favor of Monsieur de Voltaire, this alone

would be enough to earn him a place among the benefactors of the human race."

The blatant injustice of La Barre's sentence could not fail to strike anyone who could boast a modicum of common sense. For La Barre had really committed no crime. Far worse things than he had uttered had gone entirely unpunished in France. The Abbé le Camus had once in his youth scoffed at the holy communion and had fed the holy wafer to a pig. For this he had simply been expelled from France and this ban did not prevent him later from becoming a Cardinal and posing as a very pious man. In every garrison in France the young officers had for a hundred years sung the same coarse songs about Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, and Saints of both sexes, and nobody ever thought of punishing them for it.

In the winter of 1767-68 Pasquier again bellowed to the Parliament that Voltaire's attacks on religion could not be tolerated any longer, and that it was his firm intention to put Voltaire into prison as soon as a copy of the manuscript *Le Diner du comte de Boulainvilliers,* which was scarcely in circulation, should fall into his hands. These words bespoke the humor of the stupid population of Paris, and Voltaire knew that he had to be on his guard for the rest of his days.

The short writing *Le Diner du comte de Boulainvilliers* (1767) is one of Voltaire's best.

This dialogue gives the entire Voltairian criticism of the Bible in a nutshell. It is a sharply effective, very concise, clear and also witty little book.

Meanwhile he had published a short, conclusive sketch entitled *Relation de la mort du Chevalier de La Barre.* This bore the date of July 15, 1766, though it was actually written in 1768. It was put out under the name of M. Cas.... *advocat au conseil du Roi.* The dedication was to the great Italian criminologist, Marchese de Beccaria, whose famous book the vacillating Muyart de Vouglans had tried to refute, at the same time that he signed the petition protesting against the sentence of the Chevalier de La Barre. Voltaire introduces his work by stating two principles which throw a glaring light on the French sense of justice.

"First: When a nation is still so barbaric as to subject the indicted man to torture, e.g., to make them suffer death not once but a thousand times, without learning whether he is guilty or innocent, it is at least clear that this excess of fury is not necessary in the case of a defendant who confesses his guilt.

"Second: It is as foolish as it is cruel to punish harmless transgressions against the prevailing customs, habits and opinions of the country, in the same way in which parricides and poisoners are punished."

And after he has set forth the whole case, Voltaire concludes:

"Several judges made the statement that under the existing circumstances religion needed this deterring example. They are very wrong. Nothing could possibly do religion more harm. Ghosts are not laid in this way; they are irritated and aroused. Unfortunately, I have heard various people say that they could not help despising a sect which sustains itself with the aid of hangmen.

"Thus a few boys, who had sung satirical songs, were threatened with the same punishment as parricides and poisoners. And the rank, stupid injustice of this very case has made people utter a hundred thousand religious mockeries. They cannot believe how contemptible our Roman Catholic Church is made to appear in the eyes of the world by this one incident. And then the judges say that politics forced them to act as they did. What beastly and barbaric politics! What a shocking crime against justice to inflict a sentence for political reasons, especially a death sentence, and above all a sentence to a death like that!"

8

As Voltaire had feared, the sentencing and execution of La Barre caused another postponement of the Sirven case.

We have seen how Elie de Beaumont put it off. Now, on the pretext that the horrors of fanaticism

had paralyzed his hand, he was even more inactive. Every wish Beaumont expressed (that the report of the case would be submitted to Chardon, that Sirven's lawyer before the *Conseil* should not be Mariette but Cassen, etc.) was fulfilled by Voltaire through his influence with the Duke de Choiseul. But it was of no avail. Elie de Beaumont did not move, and thus compromised not only his client but also Voltaire, who in the summer of 1766 had in his *Avis au public sur les parricides imputés aux Calas et Sirven,* which he had sent to various princes, referred again and again to Elie de Beaumont's petition as if this were on the point of being published. As the petition did not appear, Sirven's benefactors might suspect that he had tried to deceive them.

On top of all this, Voltaire's *Avis* became known among lawyers in Paris whose caution caused them horrible anxiety about Voltaire's violent language, and who were afraid of being regarded as conspirators with him.

In it Voltaire spoke of the madness which was drenching the globe with blood, of the courts of Christianity which had for fifteen hundred years polluted themselves with judiciary murder, out of pure superstition, and of the horrible notion that one man had a right to force other people to think as he himself thought, "But," he exclaimed, "could anything be more insane than the belief that people can be converted by defaming them, persecuting them, dragging them to the galleys, and venting one's wrath upon them with scaffold, wheel, and stake?"

The lawyers had come to him with the reservation that in any case their opinion was to be submitted to the *Conseil alone,* not to the public. But Voltaire was becoming more and more convinced that an appeal to public opinion was the only thing that could help.

Elie de Beaumont, who had promised to finish his contribution within fourteen days, now had not finished it after one and a half years. The reason for this was that he was involved in a lawsuit which occupied him entirely.

The defender of Calas and Sirven had not scrupled to take advantage of the shocking injustice of the

French laws against Protestants to line his own pockets. His wife, though Catholic herself, was descended from a Protestant family; her great-uncle when he fled to England, had sold his estate for a small sum. Now the property was very valuable. According to the law which at that time was designed to check the emigration of Protestants, the sale was invalid. So now Beaumont, in the name of his wife, demanded the return of the estate without any compensation to the present proprietor.

This lawsuit had a double unfortunate effect: All Protestants were aroused against Beaumont, and it furnished the Catholics the chance to point out how little right the official defender of Calas had to complain of intolerance toward the Protestants, as he was as intolerant as any other.

Voltaire could not say a word against Elie de Beaumont. He continued to treat him very attentively and as a reward, he, in February, 1767, received the long-awaited memorandum. La Harpe read it aloud to him at once, and he greeted it with enthusiasm and praise of Beaumont.

But afterward, on reading Damilaville's accompanying letter, it was discovered that the work was not by Beaumont at all but by Damilaville, who had elaborated it for his own pleasure.

Finally in March Voltaire came into possession of the real petition, which was signed by eighteen lawyers of Paris. They were unanimous in feeling that this was a case in which, according to the order of 1737, it was the duty of the Crown to make use of its prerogative of demanding an appeal against a judgment in default.

But just when the battle seemed to be won, something very depressing happened. The *Conseil* feared the excitement which would follow in all the Parliaments if the Sirven case were taken out of the hands of the Parliament of Toulouse and given to a court appointed by the *Conseil.* So it rejected the petition. Even the Duke of Choiseul voted against it. The work of five years was lost for Voltaire.

On February 8, 1778, he wrote to Damilaville: "The misfortune of the Sirven family is also my misfor-

tune. I admit, of course, that formal considerations can sometimes outweigh material ones; but if there is a case, in which formality should be subordinate, it is that in which human lives are at stake." Sirven could not possibly go before the Parliament of Toulouse; there he would surely be broken upon the wheel.

9

There was nothing to do but to bring the poor man back to Switzerland; and now several years pass during which time the name Sirven disappears from Voltaire's correspondence. But only one who knew him very little would think that with a will such as his, he had surrendered to fanaticism.

For a while he believed that he had found the solution: This was to have a relative of the deceased Madame Sirven in Languedoc file a petition that she be declared innocent. If this should succeed, Sirven's innocence would automatically be established without the necessity of his leaving Switzerland.

But Voltaire soon became convinced that the court would answer this petition by inquiring why the surviving relatives did not dare to appear.

There was nothing to do but to send Sirven to Languedoc. This was made possible by the change that had taken place in public opinion there. Among Voltaire's correspondents the one who was especially ardent in his assurances of the changes that had taken place was the Abbé Audra, Baron de Saint-Juste, a very good authority on the conditions in Toulouse. Voltaire, however, made the condition that a member of the Parliament of Toulouse be found, who would declare himself willing to protect Sirven, "so he might visit, without endangering his life, the place where Calas had found his death."

To make doubly sure, Voltaire also approached the Marquis de Garduch, asking that he, too, should be on the look-out for such a member of the Parliament. And these two succeeded in finding a member of the Parliament who solemnly promised to protect the Sirvens.

After Voltaire had so carefully paved the way, in March, 1769, Sirven traveled to Toulouse, while his daughters remained in Switzerland. He had to take the step now, for, on September 11, 1769, it would be five years since the sentence in default had been executed upon the dummy that represented him, and after that time the verdict would be irrevocable, the appeal invalid.

At first Sirven traveled about in southern France, gathering material for his defense. The most valuable result of these efforts was the report from the medical faculty in Montpellier, charging the court physicians with criminal ignorance. Voltaire wrote to Professor le Roi (August 16, 1769):

"It is horrible to think that in France the life and honor of a father of a family are at the mercy of an ignorant surgeon and an idiotic judge."

At the end of August Sirven reported at the prison in Mazamet. There he was treated so harshly that Voltaire was forced to file a violent protest with the attorney-general in Toulouse. It seemed a favorable omen that Landes was this time declared disqualified and was replaced by another judge, Labrugnière, who was to render a new decision together with the same two colleagues who had imposed the sentence in 1764.

On September 2 Sirven was questioned for the first time and was confronted with forty-four witnesses. The prosecutor made use of his right to hear only the witnesses against Sirven.

Trinquier did not hesitate to read the evidence given by those witnesses who were now dead and consequently beyond the reach of cross-questioning by Sirven's counsel. In spite of all this the severely tried man, in whose mental abilities Voltaire had shown too little confidence, was able to advance ample proof of his innocence. Although the hearings lasted sixteen days, Sirven's caution and ready wit never faltered. He entered into debates with every one of the witnesses, and pointed out atrocious contradictions in the evidence given. Especially did he finish off the physician Gallet Duplessis, for whom

the opinions of the professors of medicine were annihilating.

All this did not prevent the prosecutor from moving, on November 10, 1769, that Sirven be sentenced for the murder of his daughter. The court decided that the charge against Sirven should be dismissed; he was discharged from prison and his confiscated fortune released.

XII

CATHERINE II

1

For several years Russia had tried to get into closer touch with Voltaire. We have seen that for a long time he was fascinated by Peter the Great; we also have seen how the attention he devoted to Peter caused ill humor in Frederick; for, the latter believed that Prussia was more deserving than Russia to have its greatness immortalized by the pen which at that time had the power of giving or withholding fame to an empire.

Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great, born before Peter's marriage to Catherine, was a weak woman who allowed herself three times to be passed over for the succession to the throne; nevertheless, in 1741, by a conspiracy and a revolution of the troops in the palace, she was proclaimed Empress. She was coarse and erotic, and greedy for pleasure, but not devoid of intellect and wit, and therefore she made advances to Voltaire. She sent him her portrait in a frame of large diamonds. Russia is revealed in the fact that the gift disappeared on the way. He consoled himself with having a kindred spirit in an Empress who lived two thousand miles away from him. This compensated him for the "clamor of the street gamins." He felt it a painful loss when Elizabeth died in 1762.

As a matter of fact he suffered no loss for a woman ascended the Russian throne who felt such a devotion to him as thirty-six years before Frederick the Great had felt. The friendship of Catherine II refreshed Voltaire's old age, as Frederick's friendship had been a satisfaction of his prime.

For the second time in Voltaire's life a sovereign, who was a genius, assumed the position of his pupil, and did everything to make him feel the gratitude which he knew his work deserved.

Catherine sought in Voltaire's writings the enlightenment and instruction for which her soul longed, but she had read him for almost seventeen years before she made a personal approach. Unquestionably she sought out Voltaire because she was aware of the unfavorable impression the revolution to which she owed her throne had created at many Courts. She did not like to have public opinion against her. She considered that all would be well if she could get on her side the man who was more the champion and protector of the wronged than any other in Europe. But not only this consideration of expediency, but also something far finer drew Catherine to Voltaire.

In October, 1763, she wrote him the first of her letters, as a reply to a letter he had written to Pictet:

"Today I have my first occasion to regret that I cannot write verses; so the best I can do is to answer yours in prose; but I can assure you that, since 1746, when I became mistress of my own time, I have the strongest obligations toward you. Before that time I read novels only; then by chance your works fell into my hands; and since then I have never stopped reading them, have not wished to have anything to do with books which were not written as well and from which the same profit could not be derived. But where shall they be found? I, therefore, returned to the man who was the first awakener of my spirit and who had given me my dearest enjoyment. In any case, Monsieur, one thing is certain, that if I have any knowledge, I owe it to this man alone. But since out of pure respect, he forbids himself to tell me that he kisses my picture, I must, out of pure decency, leave him in uncertainty about my enthusiasm for his works.[1] Just now I am reading his essay on world history! I would like to learn every page of it by heart, while I am waiting for the book on the works of the great Corneille, for which, I hope, a

[1] From Voltaire's letter to Pictet, of September, 1765:
Your mother will send you news from Geneva. I, for my part, am so filled with respect for your sublime Empress that it makes me forget even your great republic. I have kissed her picture. But say nothing to her about that! It's disrespectful.

note of exchange has been sent to cover my subscription. Katharina.

2

Peter III, whose name as the Duke of Holstein was Karl Peter Ulrich, a grandson of Peter the Great, was born in Kiel, 1728. When the male line of the Romanoffs had become extinct, he was called to Russia by the Empress Elizabeth and appointed Grand-Duke and successor to the throne, on November 18, 1742. Reluctantly he let himself be converted to the Greek Church, but remained a Lutheran in spirit. At almost the same time (on November 4, 1742) the Swedish peers had elected him King, but he had not accepted the election. On September 1, 1745, he was married to the Princess Sophie Auguste of Anhalt-Zerbst.

This Peter was a brute in every respect, a drunkard from the time he was ten years old. Because he was altogether without education, it was imagined that the Grand-Marshal Brummer, a Swede, deliberately did his best to spoil his soul and mind, in anger that the Prince was not destined for the Swedish but for the Russian throne. The Marshal cannot be held responsible for the boy's vices. It cost him the greatest efforts to stop the boy from always getting drunk at the table.

Peter really thought far more of his little duchy of Holstein than of the Russian empire. He soon armed himself against Denmark to press the claims of the House of Holstein upon Schleswig. He was even thinking of taking the command of his Russian army for that purpose, when a conspiracy in Petersburg snatched power from his hands.

Catherine, whose original name was Sophie Auguste, was born in Stettin in May, 1728, the daughter of Prince Christian August of Anhalt-Zerbst, who was a Prussian general and Governor of Stettin. At the recommendation of Frederick the Great she was chosen by Elizabeth to be the wife of Peter.

When, in February, 1744, she came with her mother to Moscow, she found her fiancé a very childish boy

in spite of his sixteen years. In his rooms he did nothing but make his two lackeys march up and down. He ranked them, promoted and degraded them, just as he pleased.

As soon as Catherine, then fourteen years old, arrived, she took lessons in the Greek religion and in Russian; for, she was well aware that it was of the greatest importance to give the people the feeling that she was thorough Russian in language and feeling. She studied Russian so diligently that whenever she could not sleep at night, she sat up in bed and learned by heart the books which her tutor had given her. She had scarcely awakened in the morning when she sat in her nightgown and studied Russian. In doing this, she contracted pneumonia, and almost died.

She, who knew the value of keeping silence, was amazed to hear how her fiancé prated, without the slightest trace of self-restraint. He told her that, since they were cousins, he could confide in her. He was in love with one of the ladies of the Queen, who had had to leave the Court because her mother had been sent to Siberia. He would have preferred to marry this girl, but had consented to marry Catherine.

With her superior mind and self-restraint, she did not have to listen to more than one such remark to judge the mentality of her future spouse. But that was not all. For years this uncouth boy confided to the young girl who became his wife, but whom he scarcely wanted to touch, all the ridiculous adventures he was having with women who often were so ugly and vulgar that nobody else would look at them, and who told the whole world that he was repulsive, as did also all the pretty women with whom he came in contact as the successor to the throne and as czar.

Catherine had to cope with many difficulties. Her own mother committed one folly after another, and was continually on the point of arousing the Empress against the wife of the Heir Apparent; Catherine knew that, if there was anybody who had to be placated in order not to be sent back to Stettin or Anhalt, it was the Empress, who was twenty years her senior and who had to be treated with a devotion

and caution which excluded every thought of rivalry. Besides she knew that she had to be courteous and polite to everybody at Court.

As she had an unquenchable good humor, she won more and more hearts.

3

The foundation of her literary education was laid by a Swedish nobleman, Count Gyllembourg. He gave her Plutarch, Cicero, Montesquieu to read, but tried especially to give the young girl strength of mind and firmness of character. She resolved to follow his advice. Her fiancé had just then told her that the distance between his castle and hers was too great as to permit him to visit her more than rarely. She was too proud to complain of this.

She was married to Peter in 1745 and was now the Grand Duchess. Her mother departed for home; her father died, and when she wept violently and long for him, the Empress commanded her to stop sniveling. There was, she said, no reason to mourn for the loss of a father who had not been a king.

Catherine's appearance was charming. She was dark, with blue eyes. Many men paid her homage. As soon as it seemed that she were interested Bishop Theodorski was sent out to question her, and others to spy on her. But nothing could be discovered. Her passion was still intellectual. She read serious books, Bayle's *Dictionnaire,* Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois,* and especially the *Annals* of Tacitus, which made a great impression upon her, and taught her to look for the reasons lying behind events. But more than all she read Voltaire, and whatever else she read she regarded with his eyes.

In the meantime the Grand Duke played with his lackeys, drilled them, changed his uniform twenty times a day, trained a brace of dogs, sent grenadier uniforms to his mistresses as gifts: bear skin caps and epaulettes.

Catherine's beauty came into its glory when she rode on horseback or when she was at a ball. She was

a most expert rider, and she had more endurance than any other lady at the balls. She dressed as simply and unostentatiously as possible, in order not to displease the Empress. Elizabeth had good-looking legs, and she was proud of them, so in order to show them as much as she could she liked to order masquerades to which the men came dressed as women, the ladies in men's attire. Catherine says in her memoirs:

"She was a treat in men's clothing. One could not tear one's eyes away from her. One night I watched her dance a minuet. When it was over she came to me. I took the liberty of telling her that it was really lucky for the ladies that she was not a man, and that her portrait alone might cause many ladies to lose their heads. She took my compliment graciously and answered in the same tone that, if I were a man, she would award me the apple. I bent down to kiss her hand for such an unexpected courtesy. Thereafter she kissed me, and the whole company tried to find out what had gone on between us."

At this scene one recalls that Elizabeth's celebrated reader, the Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont was dressed as a woman.

Catherine was clever enough in her behavior to overcome some of the prejudices Elizabeth had against her. One senses that in her innermost heart she understood Elizabeth, that she has penetrated the Empress's secret sexual inclinations, when she relates in another place that although she continued to be dressed as simply as possible at the balls, at masquerades, on the contrary, she was allowed to wear the most gorgeous men's costumes, chosen tastefully and beautifully sewn, embroidered and trimmed with lace. "This pleased the Empress. I do not know exactly why."

During seventeen years Catherine was Grand Duchess, her relations with her husband fall into two periods. In the first, he made her his confidant and asked her advice, especially in all political matters; in the second he became domineering and hostile. In one respect only he remained always the same, his imbecility.

Catherine tells how one day she heard such horrible cries coming from his quarters that she opened the door:

"I saw him holding one of his dogs up in the air by its collar, while a Kalmuck boy who was with him held it by its tail, it was a poor little English dog, and with the heavy butt of his whip the Grand Duke struck the dog with all his strength. I tried to intercede for the poor beast; but after that he only doubled his strokes. As I could not stand this cruel spectacle, I retired to my rooms with tears in my eyes. But instead of moving the Grand Duke to pity, tears only made him more bitter. Pity was for him a painful emotion, which his nature could not endure."

Four years later when Peter was twenty-five years, she frequently had to go to his room to make peace there. He liked to sit and drink with his attendants, and then suddenly start up and strike them with a cane or with the flat of a sword. Sometimes this made them so furious that he had to run to her to quiet them. One day under these circumstances she was surprised to see a rat, which her husband had hung on an improvised gallows.

"He told me that this rat had committed a crime which, according to martial law, deserved the most stringent death penalty. It had climbed over the ramparts of a paper fort, which stood on a table, and had eaten two plaster sentries which were stationed on one of the towers. He had the criminal sentenced according to martial law. His dog had caught the rat and the latter was promptly hanged, and would hang there for three days as a deterring example for the public. I could not help laughing at this insanity. But this displeased him very much as he took the matter seriously. I entrenched myself behind my female ignorance of the military code. He, however, remained hurt at my laughter. At least it could be said in the rat's defense that he had been sentenced unheard, without any legal process."

As long as possible Catherine tried to keep others from learning of Peter's fits of insanity and brutality. He let her rule his beloved Holstein for him, as he had no idea of politics. But this did not last

long. He was almost continually drunk, always surrounded by flatterers who persuaded him that he was a great commander. Peter had an unbounded admiration for Frederick the Great, not an admiration for his genius, but for his uniforms and parades. This admiration was later of importance. Peter the Third's only real usefulness in this world was when he got Frederick the Great out of the desperate situation in which he was in 1761, when he himself no longer saw a way out. Just then Elizabeth died, and Peter promptly made peace and an alliance with his ideal. Catherine writes:

"Since the year 1755 his chief pastime was to set up a vast number of little dolls, soldiers of wood, zinc, tinder, and wax, which he arranged in order on narrow tables taking up the space of the whole room. He had narrow brass bands nailed to the sides of these tables, and connected by wires, and when he pulled these the brass bands sounded, he said, like rolling gunfire. He was meticulous about celebrating the feasts of the Court by making these troops fire volleys. Besides a daily inspection parade was held; e.g., the dolls which had to go on watch were taken from every table. The Grand Duke attended the inspection in dress uniform, with high boots, spurs and cuirass and baldrick. Those of his servants who were admitted to this lovely drill were dressed in the same way."

4

In this eternal drunkenness he frequently entered the Grand Duchess's bedroom and drew his sword, now to threaten her, then again to defend her against imaginary foes. She was not exactly frightened, but asked him to sleep off his intoxication. He had affairs openly with ladies of the Court, and finally came altogether under the domination of one of them, Elizabeth Woronzoff by name, and promised her that he would get a divorce from Catherine as soon as he should become Czar.

The Empress ordered that an heir to the throne should be produced. But, due to the atmosphere of

wine and tobacco in which he lived, and perhaps also to his poor digestion, any close physical contact with the Grand Duke was suffocatingly offensive. In her memoirs Catherine hints that, without Peter's help, but with the hearty co-operation of the young, handsome Soltykoff, the first man she fell in love with, she obeyed the order of the Empress and gave birth to Paul I. By a strange freak of nature, however, he did not resemble his handsome father, but Peter III, and became, like him, ugly, childish and grotesque. From now on Catherine changed her tactics. She openly showed her contempt of those who fought her and spied on her at Court, and her hearty friendship for those upon whom she could depend. She let it be known that no longer could she be slighted or insulted without somebody paying for it. At the same time she let loose her temper. No sooner had Soltykoff disappointed her by his bad behavior than Stanislaw Paniatowski took his place. Catherine gave birth to a daughter.

As she now fully understood the moodiness of the Grand Duke, his weaknesses and his violence, she was convinced of the necessity of beginning to form a party for herself with a view to the future. The physical and mental qualities of her husband indicated that he would soon be a wreck. Should she perish with him if he refused to listen to reasonable advice, or should she pursue her own independent course? In reality there was no question in her mind about it. She had the ability, by her personal charm, to become the darling of the people, even more, to be the one by whom nearly the entire population would wish to be ruled.

Then suddenly, in 1762, Elizabeth died. Peter III followed her on the throne, and as Empress Catherine felt her existence stronger than ever before. The Czar had entirely broken with her. The haughtiness of his mistress knew no bounds. At this time the Empress was exposed to the danger that some day at one of his mad carousals the Czar might disown her and her son as heirs. Again and again he threatened to banish her from Russia or to put her into a convent.

Peter had been on the throne half a year when, on July 8, the revolution broke out. This had been secretly fomented by the brothers Orloff in the army, and by the Princess Daschkoff at Court. During the night of July 9 Catherine went with her lover, Gregor Orloff, with whom she lived faithfully for the next twelve years, from Peterhof to the capital, where she was proclaimed Empress. Peter, poor wretch, lost his courage, and did not dare take command of his army. He sent Catherine a letter the next day, in which he renounced the throne and promised to return to Germany.

Probably the promise of the half-imbecile was not considered dependable; for it could always be taken back as given under compulsion; so the resolute and relentless Alexis Orloff, brother of the handsome and good-natured Gregor, gave the order that he be made away with. A week after the revolution he was found strangled at his country estate, Ropschka, where he had been interned. The Empress was told nothing of this murder until it was accomplished. She certainly did not mourn this incident; but she knew that it would leave a stain on her name, which would be difficult to erase, but which it was absolutely essential to have removed. Although since ancient times the constitution of Russia had been autocratic, mitigated by assassination, it was nevertheless embarrassing to have to take the responsibility for this deed which was not her fault.

Certain as it is that she was the responsible leader of the palace revolution, it is equally certain that she was innocent in the murder. The passionate condemnations of her for this deed have their origin in the mania of ignorant people for condemning. Frederick the Great who knew about it, the Prince of Ligne who knew everything and everybody, the Princess Daschkoff who was one of the chief conspirators of the palace revolution, all testify separately that the plot to strangle Peter III had been kept from Catherine. The Princess had even seen the cynical letter (later published) from Alexis Orloff to the Empress, in which he informed her of the murder of her husband and implored her forgiveness.

She was horrified at the murder, and she burst into tears. But in her contempt for hypocrisy, she restrained her tears. She was too politic and too proud to punish the crime; she was aware that this would be regarded as a farce. She was content, for her own and for her son's sake, to keep Orloff's letter in safety, and to set to work on the problem of becoming the greatest ruler of Russia since Peter the Great. She succeeded. Diderot described her: "The soul of a Brutus in the pretty body of a Cleopatra." Brutus is by no means the right name. But she did have a heroic soul. The Prince of Ligne defined it as "imperturbable." She liked the word so much that after that she signed her letters to him "Votre imperturbable."

The connection between Catherine and Voltaire was brought about thus: The French ambassador in Petersburg, Monsieur de Breteuil—a nephew of Madame du Châtelet—wrote on September 13, 1762: "The Empress wished to know whether I was acquainted with Sieur de Voltaire, and she asked me to correct his opinion about the rôle the Princess Daschkoff played."

Catherine had in her entourage the Genevese Pictet whose name appears in a letter from Voltaire to Mademoiselle Cairon, dated September 19, 1760. He says that, if she really would do his house the honor of visiting him and playing in one of his dramas, he had an actor who was six feet, one inch tall. This man, whom Voltaire was wont to call his dear giant, was Pictet, who in the meantime had become Catherine's private secretary. On August 4, 1762, he, probably at the request of the Empress, wrote to the patriarch:

"I am convinced that everybody who knew the real character of Peter III, his way of acting and his plans for the future, will approve of the Russian nation for forcing such a man to abdicate in favor of the most dignified and greatest empress ever seen in this world. . . . You may rest assured that the Empress did not seek the throne, but yielded to a general demand from the people when she ascended it. . . . The revolution was brought on simply by the

contrast between the characters of Peter III and Catherine. What should the Russian nation think when it saw Peter III? He had spent his youth with Court fools: in the first few weeks after his coronation he awakened a little hope in the breasts of his subjects—as long as he continued to go to the Empress for advice; but after that he surrendered entirely to excesses and to the most disgusting gluttony. What should the people think when they saw how their Emperor spent day and night at the table, and was drunk every time he appeared in public?

Voltaire apparently at first believed the Empress guilty, but he showed a certain indulgence. He wrote to the ambassador Schuwaloff with whom he was in communication in regard to his *History of Peter the Great:* "There is some talk of a violent colic which helped Peter to forget the trifling unpleasantness of having lost an empire of 2000 miles' circumference. Your Semiramis only lacks a Ninias to make the resemblance perfect. I must confess I'm afraid I am so far gone on the downward path that I cannot be as indignant over that as a good Christian should be. Much good can come from a little wickedness. Fate is like the Jesuits; it employs all means." As the text of the letter shows, Voltaire was inclined to believe the worst, but also to excuse the worst if it were true. He had a suspicion that Catherine's secretary was not writing without the request of the Empress, but he pretended that he did not suspect. He sent a polite but guarded answer. Pictet, not content with this reserved attitude on the part of the great man, wrote back:

"Monsieur, I received yesterday the letter which you did me the honor of sending, and I hasten to reply, although as yet I do not know on what day the courier for Monsieur de Breteuil is to leave. Will you permit me to scold you? I am very sorely tempted, but I hardly dare to take that liberty. I wrote you a long letter. Whatever I said, you must have been perfectly well aware that I had the letter read secretly in the highest quarters. An answer was awaited with impatience. This answer arrives; but it is so dry, so cold, so meager, that I have not been

willing to show it. For almost six months I have not sent a letter to Geneva without annoying people to ask you to entrust me your new plays and whatever new things you have written, since I went to Russia. I do not know what expression to use to beg you to do me this kindness.

"When I tell you that my future depends upon your kindness, it does not overstate the case. They are so flattering here as to call me a writer, and the pleasant thing you wrote about me to Monsieur de Schuwaloff has helped to confirm the belief that you have a certain respect for my person and my abilities.

"From this it is concluded that it is not proper for you to refuse me a copy of your production, and Her Majesty, who knows by heart almost everything you published, never ceases to ask me to secure for her your new play and everything else you have written and are writing now, that has not been included in your collected works. You can be sure that nobody except Her Majesty shall see anything that should remain in confidence. She has permitted me to give you her word. She has also requested me to ask your permission for the performance of your new plays, when we get them, at Court. In speaking of performances at Court this does not mean by actors (there are none here this summer) but by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court. This winter we are studying *Zaïre, Alzire* and Genghis Khan.

5

Voltaire's cool attitude could not fail to be melted by such attention and enthusiasm. Had it only been for the sake of the good giant whose position in St. Petersburg depended upon Voltaire's courtesy, a polite response was absolutely inevitable. Unfortunately the first letters exchanged between him and the Empress have been lost. But we see that he continued for some time longer to write to Pictet, and that his letters to the secretary were seized upon by the Empress.

In the first of Catherine's letters that we possess,

it is said: "I committed a mortal sin when I appropriated the first letter that you wrote to the giant about me. I left a whole batch of petitions on the shelf, and kept numerous people in suspense as to their fates, so desirous was I to read it. And I am not even remorseful about it."

In the letter she opened, which though not addressed to her was meant for her eyes, she found so much that flattered her that she asks Monsieur de Voltaire "very seriously" not to praise her before she has earned the praise.

Voltaire is inclined to believe only the best of her. But he has heard that there is discontent in Russia. He asks the Count d'Argental: "Is it true that in Russia the fire is glowing under the ashes? that there is a powerful faction in favor of Prince Ivan? that my dear Empress will be dethroned and that we are to have new material for tragedies?" Several weeks later (August 13, 1763) he writes to the Countess d'Argental: "I am afraid that my dear Empress will be killed." He could have spared himself this anxiety. Catherine was not the type to allow herself to be dethroned or assassinated. She could not be frightened; her will was very unlikely to let an enemy deliver the first blow. Ivan, who—judging by Catherine's manifesto—was only a wild beast, had scarcely time to raise the banner of revolt, before he was disposed of.

Voltaire was hurt by this, and he thought of adding an article against cruel deeds to the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Catherine had asked from him. But by and by he found himself respecting Catherine's imperturbable self-reliance, and he shared the opinion of d'Alembert, who wrote to him: "My good friend in Russia has just issued a long manifesto concerning the adventures of Prince Ivan; he was really, as she says, a wild beast. The proverb warns us: 'It is better to subdue the devil than to be subdued by him.' If Princes were adopting mottoes, as in the old times, it strikes me that this phrase would be appropriate to her. . . . I agree with you when you say that philosophy has no reason to boast of such pupils. But what will you have? One must love his friends with all their faults."

6

In 1765, Voltaire published *La Philosophie de l'histoire par feu l'Abbé Bazin* with the following dedication:

"To the right honorable and majestic Princess Catherine II, Empress of all the Russias, protectress of arts and sciences, who by her great gifts is able to judge the nations of the past, as she is worthy of ruling over her own. Most devotedly dedicated by the nephew of the author."

The Empress answered: "The Empress of Russia is very much obliged to the nephew of Abbé Bazin for dedicating to her the work of his uncle. . . . She has read this beautiful book with great joy, and did not find that she was superior to what she read, as she herself is a member of that poor human race which has such a strong bent for the strangest follies. Unfortunately she is convinced that the book will be the victim of this bent and that it will be publicly burned at Paris—which can only bring new glory to the book. As the nephew of the Abbé Bazin has kept deep silence about the place of his residence, this answer is addressed to Monsieur de Voltaire who is so famous as a protector and helper of young writers whose talent leads him to hope that at some time they will be useful to the human race. This famous writer is asked to forward these short lines to their destination, and should he by any chance not know this nephew of the Abbé Bazin, he will certainly excuse this step, in view of the splendid gifts of the young man."

For some time Catherine's letters pursue this little joke about the nephew of Abbé Bazin. When he has finally been located, the Empress sends him a little package to show her gratitude for the nice things he had said. The package was probably valuable enough, small though it was.

In May, 1767, Voltaire is so enthusiastic about his Catherine (he likes to call her disrespectfully *ma* Cateau) that he writes to his ostensible friend Madame du Deffand: "I am her champion and de-

fend her to everybody. I know well that she is reproached with a trifle regarding her husband; but these are family matters, where I do not intrude; besides, it does no one any harm to have a mistake to live down; that induces all the stronger efforts to win back the public respect and admiration, and it is certain that her despicable husband would never have done such deeds as my Catherine does every day."

These words were provoking to moralists whose knowledge of the facts amounted to zero and whose conviction that they themselves were the most highly moral characters was unshakable. Of course, Madame du Deffand in anger at once informed her beloved Horace Walpole of Voltaire's frivolous opinion, an anger Walpole shared and expressed: "Voltaire is a puzzle to me, with his Catherine. A nice subject for levity, the murder of a husband and the theft of a crown! It is, he says, not a bad thing to have a crime to make good for. What does one do to atone for a murder? Perhaps by buying poets for a pension? Or by paying money to historians who have their price? And by supporting ridiculous philosophers at a distance of one thousand miles?"

When one reads such things one might believe that Catherine's guilt was proven, and that her virtues and abilities were limited to a few gifts to foreign writers.

The indefatigable Madame du Deffand, whose tongue was as sharp as a razor, did not rest until she had aroused even the gentle Duchess de Choiseul against Voltaire for his friendly relations with Catherine:

"What! Voltaire finds murder a matter for jest! And what a murder! The murder of a ruler by a subject, murder of a husband by his wife! This woman plots against her husband and monarch, takes his Empire and his life in the most cold-blooded way, steals the throne from her own son, and Voltaire calls this a family matter! . . . These shocking crimes are mere trifles, says he, faults, mistakes, easily atoned for. . . . So she is white as snow, the glory of her empire, beloved by her subjects, admired by

the universe, the wonder of the century; you felt this as I do and you have answered him with the finest mockery. If he only could blush about it!"

7

These strict ladies, with their cut-and-dried code of morals, really knew nothing of the nobility of Catherine's soul. They knew nothing of how untiringly she strove to perfect her knowledge of Russia, what pains she was taking to preserve order and introduce improvements. She introduced vaccination, founded hospitals, poorhouses, foundling asylums. She encouraged every institution which could further civilization, science, art, and navigation, sent Russian scholars and artists abroad, founded a Russian Academy like the French, to foster and develop the language. She established schools for the poor, as well as more advanced schools, in all the larger cities and in many small towns. She reformed Russian court procedure, abolished torture, gathered representatives from all the provinces and gave them the problem of writing a new general code of law. From the feeble beginnings that had been made, she developed Russian navigation, freed the commerce in the interior of the country from all obstacles, thus at the same time improving farming conditions. She was constantly negotiating with foreign states for agreements that would facilitate imports and exports. She was moderate in her foreign policies. Only for a short time, after the fall of Orloff (in 1773), her new favorite Potemkin led Russia into a dangerous foreign policy. In all circumstances she remained Voltaire's true and enthusiastic disciple. She promoted culture and humanity, westernized her barbaric subjects with the same steadfastness of purpose as Peter the Great, but without his cruelty.

She was not only the greatest Empress Russia ever had had, but after Peter the Great Russia's greatest ruler.

Like Frederick the Great she supported the French intellectuals whom France's stupid King had perse-

cuted, and she did it with more substantial means than were at the disposal of the Prussian King. Diderot was a man who made his living not without working very hard. Catherine bought his library for 15,000 livres and gave him 1000 livres yearly as curator of this library, the use of which he retained all his life. Voltaire wrote on this occasion (April 24, 1765): "Who would have thought that the day would come when the Scythians, whom we treat so unworthily here, would become the noble patrons of magnanimity, science and philosophy! Famous Diderot, permit me to express my enthusiasm."

Diderot was shy, avoided social life, especially the life of society in Paris. Catherine induced him to undertake the journey to St. Petersburg, and she succeeded by courtesy, in taming his bearish nature so that he felt at ease in her presence. He could not help treating her as his comrade and equal in all their conversations. He had only one manner toward his friends—straightforward. When he let slip a low expression in front of her, and stopped, embarrassed, the Empress said: "Go on! Among us men everything is permitted." When he became heated, and slapped the Czarina on the thigh as he used to do with his friends in Paris to make his point more emphatically, she was content to move her chair away.

On his last evening with her in St. Petersburg—as he tells it—he burst out in a violent fit of crying, "and she almost did too." She esteemed him as one of the two leaders of the Encyclopedists and the creator of a new style of criticism. He knew how to appreciate everything he read in the spirit in which it had been written, and Catherine was genius enough to value this ability.

As she won Diderot, so did she win the other prominent minds in France. D'Alembert and Holbach became her friends, and Grimm her literary correspondent.

8

The Empress had founded a female Saint-Cyr in St. Petersburg, and the institution was flourishing.

She wrote to Voltaire (February 10, 1772): "These young ladies surpass every expectation; they are making astonishing progress, and everybody agrees that they are as lovely as they are learned. In morals they are unimpeachable, without having contracted the cheap seriousness of the nuns. During the past two winters the playing of tragedies and comedies was instituted." But the available supply of plays was exhausted; the supervisor objected to plays which dealt with love. "What shall I do in that case? I do not know, and I am turning to you for help." Voltaire answers obligingly: "If these young girls are performing tragedies, a young man from my circle of friends has just written one in which love cannot be accused of playing any part. . . . I shall send it to Your Imperial Majesty as soon as it is printed."

The play he is referring to is his own new tragedy *Les Lois de Minos*. As he assures her there is no love scene in it. It is a protest against superstition and barbarity, inspired by the sentence of Calas, and especially by the fanatical and undignified attitude of the Parliament. His aim is obvious: to support the crown which had dissolved the Parliament in Paris.

On January 23, 1771, Louis XV had, to the delight of Voltaire, declared the offices of the members of the Parliament vacant. In other words, had dissolved the Parliament without any intention of assembling it again.

9

For the remaining years of his life he kept his gaze continually upon his Catherine. He encourages her, gives her his consent and approval as often she strives to introduce any reform in which he is interested. She for her part does not care for exaggerated compliments, much less for idolization, and she answers: "Let me remain on earth. Here I am better able to receive letters from you and from your friends." When he praises her as a legislator, she answers calmly: "These laws which are so much talked about are not yet in effect. Who can know whether they are good? Posterity, not we."

When, during the Russian-Turkish War, he expresses his hope that she may get all Turkey under her rule, she meets his exaggeration with common sense. He has expressed the wish that she may rebuild ancient Troy. She answers: "I renounce this rebuilding; I prefer the beautiful Neva to the Skamander. Here in St. Petersburg I have a whole suburb to build anew because a fire destroyed it in the spring."

She tells him, however, everything that could be of interest to him, and to Europe through him, about her peaceful reforms and about her wars. Once she confided to Prince de Ligne her modest fear that she might not have enough wit for Paris. That if she were there, simply as a Russian woman among the many travelers, she could get no one to come to supper with her. Sainte-Beuve said that she got this longed for supper in Paris, through her correspondence with Voltaire.

He began to value her highly because she set an example of religious tolerance. Later on, in spite of his love of peace, he wished her victory over the Turks, because of his enthusiasm for ancient Hellas. He was hopeful that Catherine would liberate Greece. The thought of taking this sacred soil from the Turks, those beautiful inspiring ruins of antiquity, those historic scenes where man first dared to think freely, filled him with enthusiasm and made him more militant than she herself.

He felt the glow which surrounds historic Athens, "this little town which will always enjoy a fame far greater than all its conquerors, even if they were lords of the globe." For him Hellas is the revered, the holy land, Europe's true sanctuary. Therefore he sings of Catherine's war against the Turks as the true crusade:

> Voici le vrai temps des croisades!
> Français, Bretons, Italiens . . .
> Ecoutez Pallas qui vous crie:
> Vengez-moi, vengez ma patrie!

He is very sad when she thinks of making peace without having assured the freedom of Greece.

Later he writes sorrowfully to Frederick: "You know what an occasion for rejoicing it would have been for me to see the descendants of Sophocles and Demosthenes set free."

What he hoped to live to see was accomplished in 1830, sixty years later.

10

It is easy to understand what a deep impression Voltaire's death must have made upon Catherine. She was shocked that such a man, the greatest of his country, was refused a grave in France.

To Melchior Grimm, she wrote: "Since Voltaire has died, it seems to me as if good humor has lost its honor. He was the God of grace. Please secure for me a very complete edition of his works, to restore and fortify my natural inclination to laughter; for if you don't get it to me before long you will hear nothing but elegies from me. For some time I have given up counting upon two things as consequences of my deeds: the gratitude of my people and posthumous fame. I do the best thing for its own sake and this is all that sustained me in the discouragement and indifference to all the affairs of this world, which overcame me at news of Voltaire's death. For he was my teacher. He, or rather his works, have shaped my mind. When I was younger I wished to please him. If I accomplished something I immediately had to tell him about it, for my own pleasure. He became so used to this that he scolded me if I did not report it to him myself and he heard it from others. Send me a hundred copies of the works of my master, so that I can distribute them everywhere. They shall serve as examples; I want the minds of my subjects to be moulded by them."

Catherine answers Grimm, when he compliments her on the strength, depth, and beauty in her letters, saying that if something like that were to be found, she owed it to Voltaire alone. She had never been deceived by spurious works attributed to him. She

sensed immediately the grip of the lion. Nobody could successfully imitate it.

She would have liked to have a Casa Sancta erected in Ferney, corresponding to the house in Loreto.

XIII

PRECURSORS OF THE EARTHQUAKE

1

Madame de Pompadour had cherished the hope that the Prince de Soubise, in alliance with Austria, would destroy the power of Frederick the Great. When, after the battle of Rossbach, the Prime Minister, Cardinal Bernis, no longer shared this illusion and sought peace with Prussia, she lost confidence in him and not only deprived him of his position but also had him exiled.

His successor, the Duke de Choiseul, was a man of wonderful endowments. He had a splendid mind, malicious, witty, firm, quick and decisive, and though not handsome he had a winning personality, and was clever enough to assure his position by pretending a violent passion for Madame de Pompadour, whose friend and lover he became. He was supported by his sister, the Duchess Beatrice de Gramont, who was more to him than just a sister. She was quite devoted to her brother, shared his thoughts and worked with him and for him. After he had married an immense fortune, he had great power. He spent 800,000 francs a year on his household and had as many as eighty courses on his table every day.

He had come from Austria where he had been Ambassador, and was deeply interested in Madame de Pompadour's Austrian sympathies. He aimed at an alliance between France, Austria and Spain, and regarded England as the hereditary enemy. His main idea was to bind Spain firmly and permanently to France.

In internal politics he wanted to use the Jansenists and Parliaments against the Jesuits, and at the same time wanted to win the support of the literati, the philosophes, the encyclopedists and freethinking public opinion.

Madame de Pompadour's dream of glory had gone up in smoke. She had hoped to be able to connect with her name victories and conquests, to extend the borders of the kingdom, to see Frederick beg for mercy. Now she could scarcely count the defeats and misfortunes that followed Rossbach: the defeats of Minden and Willinghausen, the bombardment of the north coast of France, the blockade of the navy in the French harbors, losses in India and America as well as in Europe, and internal misery as a consequence of the wars. Agriculture suffered from the shortage of labor, commerce was destroyed, the finances exhausted, valuable territories lost with the surrender of Nova Scotia, Canada, the island of Cap-Breton, and all the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River in North America.

Madame de Pompadour's health had been undermined long ago; from her earliest youth she had tuberculosis. The loss of the King's love and the forced abandonment of her dream of glory killed the queen of Rococo. She died April 15, 1764. Several days later the King said that he had never loved her and that he had only retained her because he knew that if he dismissed her she would die. Maria Leszczynska wrote, just after the Marquise was buried, to her friend, the President Hénault: "She who has just died is talked of as little here as though she had never existed. It really pays to live."

2

On August 19, 1743, Jeanne, the illegitimate daughter of Anne Béqus called Quantiny, came into the world. A financier by the name of Dumonceau was touched by the poverty of the mother, and put the pretty child under the care of his mistress, a courtesan who called herself Mademoiselle Frederica and who was not exactly a born educator. On the other hand she was clever enough to feel some qualms about her own future should the child, as seemed likely, develop into a beauty. She therefore persuaded Dumonceau to put the girl into the Saint-

Aure convent, which was devoted to the bringing up of girls whose position might early expose them to the temptations and dangers of life.

Her up-bringing here was doubtless far better and stricter than with Mademoiselle Frederica, but also far more monotonous and boring; for this reason the young Jeanne ran away from the convent one day and went through the streets with a big open box peddling watch chains, tobacco cases, false pearls, pins with false diamonds, and all sorts of pretty wares, which were bought, thanks to the pretty eyes of the young peddler. At the same time she silently offered herself in so effective a way that the lackeys of prominent men brought her to their masters so the latter could make their purchases first hand.

Soon she got a position in a millinery store and for some time was connected with a barber by the name of Lamet. Then her mother introduced her to the home of a neighbor who kept a gambling parlor. Here she met a crafty and unscrupulous idler with the appropriate nick-name of Roué, a Count du Barry, who made her the favorite of his harem in Paris. He soon realized that he could make his fortune by turning over the young woman, who had developed into an astonishing beauty, at a handsome profit.

In society this Count met Richelieu, and when the latter once chanced to remark that since Madame de Pompadour's death the King had surrendered completely to excesses, the remark took root in Jean du Barry's imagination. Several times he brought the young woman to the Marshal, sang her charms to him, and told him, half in jest, half in earnest, that he destined her for King Louis. Richelieu, for whom even Madame de Pompadour had been too bourgeoise, considered this girl of the people impossible. He rejected the Count's proposition, not without irony; but Jean du Barry did not give up his plan, and he pestered the Marshal so persistently that finally the latter said. "Well, speak to Lebel (the chamberlain); then perhaps your darling will some day get an invitation to the Louvre."

She got it, and she aroused the passion of the

King. She was provided with a false genealogical tree and also a husband; Jean du Barry wrote to his brother, Guillaume du Barry, a poor captain of the marines who lived in Toulouse. He had him come to Paris, where on July 23, 1768, for a substantial reward, he was married to Jeanne Béqus, called Mademoiselle Gomard de Vaubernier; then promptly returned to Toulouse.

The Countess Jeanne du Barry was given an apartment in Versailles on the third floor, which was connected with that of the King, and she quickly surrounded herself with luxury.

The Duke of Choiseul was still in power in France, and his numerous enemies had despaired of undermining his power over the King and abandoned the idea of overthrowing him, especially since Louis' age (sixty years) seemed to preclude any further possibility of his being influenced again through his erotic weaknesses. Now suddenly and unexpectedly Madame du Barry appeared.

Choiseul regarded her with cold contempt. His sister, the Duchess de Gramont, had planned to win and lead the King. But the King wanted no more women playing politics in his proximity. All the efforts and coquetries of Madame de Gramont came to naught before his coolness. True, she was pretty and fiery and clever. Certainly, in firmness and character she outshone the Countess du Barry—which was tragically revealed during the Reign of Terror when each faced the revolutionary tribune on her own merits and stood alone on the scaffold. But here it was not a question of a contest in strength of character.

The Duchess was furious, and following the habit of the Times, she put scurrilous ballads in circulation.

But Richelieu, who had been supplanted by Choiseul, saw the chance for revenge by promoting Madame du Barry. He was resolved to introduce her at Court. But uneasily as always, the King at first fought shy of this. Slowly, very slowly, his resistance was able to be overcome, and finally one evening (April 30, 1769) Madame du Barry appeared in the

door of the hall of the palace, so splendid, so stunning in her beauty that even her opponents could not repress an outburst of admiration. There she stood, in a dress of the type that eighteenth century ladies called *un habit de combat,* ornamented with diamonds worth 100,000 francs, with her marvelous curly hair and her incomparable hands and feet—perfectly charming and bewitching. We can get an idea of her beauty from the bust by Caffieri in the Library at the Louvre.

When she sent her regards to Voltaire, she ordered that he should be given two kisses from her with her portrait. He answered: "Please be not offended, Madame, that I returned the kisses to the portrait."

3

It might seem as though the enemies of the Duke de Choiseul lacked a supporting party at Court. The clerical party had lost its powerful protectors. The Dauphin was dead. The Dauphine was dead. The Queen was dead.

But there still remained one powerful advocate of religious authority and monarchistic autocracy, a protector of the Jesuits, who all his life had felt himself to be the antithesis of Choiseul. This was the Duke d'Aiguillon, in his youth the Duke d'Agenois, the lover of the Duchess de Châteauroux, at the time that she still was Madame de la Tournelle.

In 1745 he had been removed from the intimate circle at Court because of the jealousy of Louis XV. He had spent seventeen years in disgrace, and only in 1762 was he again introduced in Versailles, where he won the friendship of the Dauphin. Choiseul, fearing his influence, sent him to Brittany as governor. Here the Duke was suspected of having produced false witnesses in the proceedings which the Jesuit party had instituted against the attorney-general de la Chalotais.

Choiseul's followers also charged Aiguillon with having appropriated state funds, while Aiguillon's

party accused Choiseul of having poisoned the Dauphin and his wife.

Madame du Barry had unexpectedly become the palladium of the Jesuit party at Court. Her circle of hangers-on made a great addition to its ranks when the Chancellor of France joined them. Maupeou had, in 1768, been appointed Chancellor of France in payment for his promise to Choiseul that he would destroy Aiguillon. Maupeou had undertaken to fix the outcome of the trial which was being held before the Parliament of Paris to determine the guilt or innocence of Aiguillon's conduct in Bretagne.

Maupeou was clever, malicious, ruthless and energetic, with a hard, relentless ambition.

Aiguillon's trial dragged on. Maupeou, who was ostensibly his ally, and therefore brought his case before a court in Paris, was in reality malevolent, and when it seemed that he would be dismissed he succeeded in having the case taken before another court, a *lit de justice,* which on July 2, 1770, decided that Aiguillon was guilty of having "committed deeds which spotted his honor" and therefore deprived him of his privileges as a Peer of France until sentence should be imposed.

This hostile procedure of the Parliament opened Madame du Barry's eyes to the danger of the Duke, and she offered him an alliance. He persuaded her to try to induce the King to exile the Duchess de Gramont.

He also explained to her that there was no safety for her as long as the Duke de Choiseul was Minister. Madame du Barry, by a hundred merry and humorous remarks, got the King accustomed to the idea of dismissing Choiseul. For instance, one day when she had discharged her cook, she said to Louis: "I have discharged my Choiseul."

Aiguillon saw that he could not depend upon Madame du Barry until he had won her over entirely. She was not made of stone, and any girl who not long since had bestowed her favors upon a barber would scarcely turn up her nose at a handsome Duke.

His passion in his liaison with Madame du Barry was probably inspired at first by mere diplomacy, and perhaps also somewhat by the memory of the insult to which Louis had subjected him because of his relations with Madame de la Tournelle. But before long he became really in love with the Countess, and was sure that she would cause the disgrace of the Duke de Choiseul. The latter, whom the King had shortly before assured that no danger of any sort threatened his Ministry, received, on December 24, 1770, a *lettre de cachet* which dismissed him from all his offices and exiled him to Chanteloup. La Vrillière became his successor.

After Choiseul had been removed, Maupeou and Aiguillon, united by a common hatred, set to work on the problem of dealing the decisive blow to the Parliament of Paris, which several days before the downfall of Choiseul, had suspended consideration of civil lawsuits under the pretext that "the members, in their deep sorrow, did not have their thoughts free enough to judge competently of the property, life and honor of the subjects of the King."

4

After La Barre had been executed as a victim of the brutality and stupidity of the Parliament of Paris, Voltaire's hatred of the various Parliaments of France had increased daily. His ingenious tale *L'Homme aux quarante écus* (of February, 1768), which tried to teach the government and the people some common sense notions of economics, and strove especially for a reformation of the unfair French tax system, was sentenced by order of the Parliament to be burned on the pyre—which glorious sentence was repeated in Rome and carried out on November 29, 1771.

A poor shop apprentice, Jean Baptiste Josserand, had accepted some books as a payment from somebody who owed him money, and had sold them to the dealer Jean Lecuyer and his wife Marie Suisse. Among these books were *Le Christianisme dévoilé,*

which was ascribed to Damilaville, a tragedy by Fontenelle, and Voltaire's *L'Homme aux quarante écus;* not only were these three books condemned to the pyre, but all three defendants, Josserand, Lecuyer and Marie Suisse were, on September 27, 1768, sentenced to stand for three days in the pillory. Josserand and Lecuyer were also to be branded, and Josserand was sent to the galleys for nine years, Lecuyer for five years, while Madame Lecuyer was to have five years imprisonment in La Salpetrière. Josserand died the day after he had been put on the pillory. Several days later (October 5) the Parliament issued a warrant for the arrest of Voltaire (which was not carried out), as the author of "a wicked book menacing to good morals."

5

Voltaire had more strength in the three fingers which held his pen than all the Parliaments of France in their clenched fists. In 1769 he published an historical work which delivered a staggering blow at the Parliamentarians of Paris.

Histoire du Parlament de Paris, par M. l'abbé Big . . . , which appeared in Amsterdam, made the Parliament a laughing-stock, without making a single untrue or slanderous statement. To recount the history of the Parliament meant to exterminate it.

The Parliament felt he had their range so well that it put up all sorts of obstacles to the sale of the book. Every bookseller who sold a copy was punished with the severest penalties. Nevertheless by the following year, 1770, the eighth edition came out, in which the original author's name is spelled out: L'abbé Bigore.

Of course, it was known at once who the real author of the book was, and it was determined not to lose any time with the empty formality of burning the book, but to seek definite proof of the identity of the author and institute proceedings against him.

But Voltaire was too clever for the Parliament. He wrote in a letter (of July 5, 1769) which was reproduced in *Le Mercure français:* "To produce such

a work would have required at least a full year of research in the archives, and even after one has plumbed to this depth it is very difficult to gather one's findings and present them in a readable book. Such a work would become more a heavy report than a history. If any bookseller is trying to pass the book off as written by me, I hereby assure him that he will gain nothing by that. Far from enabling him to sell one more copy, it would on the contrary harm the reputation of the book. It would be absurd to state that I could have burgled the records of France's judiciary department, and collected such an enormous lot of material—I who have been absent from France for over twenty years and before that have spent nearly all of my time in the country, away from Paris, busy with many different things."

In order to mislead his persecutors Voltaire, in a letter to Thiriot, of August 9, 1769, even attacked the book and called its last chapters "a masterpiece of errors and awkwardness, a crime against the language."

Voltaire, of course, had not searched through the archives himself. But in Paris he had enough friends who were glad to do it for him.

When the attorney-general Séguier visited Voltaire in Ferney, in the autumn of 1770, he told his host in an elaborately off-hand manner that four members of the Parliament were continually begging him to have *l'Histoire du Parlament* burned, and that he would be compelled in February, 1771, to start an investigation to discover the author. Voltaire answered no less calmly that he had had no part whatsoever in the writing of this work, which he considered on the whole was very truthful. If it were possible for an assembly to feel gratitude, the Parliament, in his opinion, owed such a feeling to this unknown author, who had used the greatest consideration in his description. Voltaire actually had shown a certain consideration; he had passed over in silence facts about which he had spoken in another place. Thus he had lightly passed over the shocking sentences of La Barre and Lally.

Séguier's investigation, however, did not take place

chiefly because, as we have seen, the Parliaments had other matters to occupy their thoughts.

6

The work had scarcely been published, when Voltaire was informed of a new judiciary murder.

One day on the highway in Lorraine, near Bleurville, a man was found murdered. Suspicion fell on a poor farmer by the name of Martin, who during the night of the murder had quietly slept with his family in his house. The murdered man, it was said, had stolen Martin's jacket, and had been seen wearing it; besides footprints led from the scene of the murder to Martin's house. Martin was confronted with a man who insisted that he had witnessed the crime from a hiding place; but the man did not identify him as the murderer. Martin, thinking that now he was safe, cried out in his joy: "Thank God, there is at least one who does not recognize the murderer in me!"—The court was so stupid as to regard this exclamation as an involuntary confession of guilt.

Martin was tortured and sentenced, in the first instance, to the wheel, although neither his neighbors nor his wife and children had been questioned, and although his house had never been examined for evidence. Of course, the money which had been taken from the murdered man was not found on Martin.

The Parliament in Paris acted as the court of the second instance. But, as Voltaire correctly points out, it went through the matter hastily because it was flooded with trials; for at that time there were no less than twenty-two of the departments of France under its jurisdiction. Besides, the Parliament was so occupied with the political situation that it took little pains in purely judiciary matters. Hence it did not go carefully into the details of the case, and the poor, simple and ignorant Martin was badly equipped to defend himself against the horrible charge, in which, according to the opinion of his conscienceless judges, more than mere appearances were against

him. Parliament hastily confirmed the sentence of the sub-court.

The wretched Martin was broken upon the wheel. When he was stretched upon the St. Andrew's cross on which his extremities were to be broken, he asked to be permitted to raise his arms toward heaven in token of his innocence.

Not long afterward a condemned criminal confessed to the murder for which Martin had been broken upon the wheel. Martin's family had fled to Austria; his tiny farm had been confiscated; his relatives had no idea that his innocence had been revealed.

As soon as Voltaire heard of this he wrote to d'Alembert and to Elie de Beaumont asking for further information. Elie de Beaumont refused. D'Alembert exerted himself to the utmost (October 15, 1769) "to cover these scoundrels with the shame they deserved." But Voltaire was unable to interest himself personally in the Martin case. "I can't possibly," he wrote to d'Argental on August 30, 1769, "be the Don Quixote of everybody who is hanged or broken on the wheel." But Damilaville, his usual seconder in cases of this kind, was dead, d'Alembert was not fit to carry the matter through himself, and consequently poor Martin's honor was never reestablished. However, one can see from Voltaire's letters (March 3, 1770, and still later in October, 1775) that he was very anxious to help the unfortunate family.

7

The judgments of July 2, 1770, by which the Parliament tried to brand the Duke d'Aiguillon as dishonest, in defiance of the King's order to drop the proceedings, was not unreasonably interpreted by Louis XV as a personal insult. For Aiguillon was not only the friend of Madame du Barry, but had also won the confidence of the King.

Maupeou knew how to capitalize the King's resentment. Some time before he had occupied the position of first President of the Parliament of Paris,

and had engaged in a zealous fight for a new hearing for La Barre, but had got such an unfavorable impression of his colleagues that he was only too pleased at an opportunity to shatter their power. It was his intention to deprive them of all political influence and to limit their scope to that of judiciary body only.

In November, 1770, he succeeded in inducing Louis to give up his former indecisive and hesitating attitude and to give his endorsement to a decisive action. On November 27 the Parliament issued an edict, the preamble of which reviewed all its mistakes and demanded absolute obedience to the Royal will.

The edict forbade the several Parliaments ever again to try to unite and speak as one organization; they must never again discontinue the administration of justice by mutual consent. They were, of course, allowed to offer suggestions to the King; but if these were not considered they were obliged to ratify and pass at once the laws sent them by the King. Naturally, the Parliament refused to ratify this very edict.

The King replied with an order from his Cabinet, in which he demanded obedience. Now the entire Parliament resigned. Thereupon during the night of January 19 to January 20, 1771, every member of the Parliament received a personal *lettre de cachet* ordering him to resume the performance of public business; the assembled Parliament, however, stuck by its guns unanimously. Then in the following night every single member received a new *lettre de cachet* informing him of his dismissal, in the name of the King and of the Privy Council, and designating his place of exile.

The previous sphere of action of the Parliament of Paris was reduced by the establishment of six new Supreme Courts in various cities. In Paris a new Parliament of seventy-five members was formed and all the seats were promptly filled with men who knew how to obey.

The provincial Parliaments saw what they had to expect, and they promptly protested in advance. But they did not frighten Maupeou. And when they were all declared dissolved and new Parliaments were to

be formed, many of the members were so intimidated that they promised obedience and asked to be accepted as members of the new courts.

Although all these happenings were an attempt to strengthen the Crown by the establishment of autocracy, which so far had not been known in France, the members of the Parliament as well as the majority of the citizens of France viewed this *coup d'état,* not without reason, as a herald of the collapse of the monarchy. This is evidenced in many political songs of the time.

Many people had been blinded by the idea that the Parliaments—a collection of bigoted, narrow-minded, power-greedy and blood-thirsty blockheads—had been a protection to the freedom of the citizen. And the entire French nation commenced a fermentation that gave a warning of the revolution that was to burst forth seventeen years later.

8

Maupeou's coup d'état had certain advantages. It was an advantage that the office of judge was no longer purchasable, even though the aim of the Minister had been only to make the judges dependent on the Crown. It was an advantage that, with the reduced area of the court's jurisdiction, the expenses of trial as well as the distance between the evidence of the defendant and the court were reduced, even though the sole aim of the Minister had been to cut down the power of the Parliament of Paris, today one cannot imagine how terrific the court costs were. The expenses of transportation there and back, of the trial and execution of Martin—as Voltaire has shown—were more than the combined annual income of all councillors at all the six newly instituted tribunals.

Maupeou had not without reason counted upon Voltaire's contempt for the old Parliaments when he approached him for support of the new institutions.

Although Voltaire denied everything he wrote on this occasion, it is certain that he was the author of

at least seven articles in praise of the newly founded courts. There must really have been a great deal of naivete still in his make-up. He seriously entertained the hope that these would be better than the old parliaments. The titles of the seven articles are: *Lettre d'un jeune Abbé sur la vénalité des charges. Réponse aux remontrances de la cour des Aides, par un membre des nouveaux conseils souverains. Avis important d'un gentilhomme à toute la noblesse du royaume. Sentiments des six conseils établis par le roi et de tous les bons citoyens. Très humbles et très respectueuses remontrances du grenier à sel. Les peuples aux parlements. L'Equivoque.*

Voltaire led the upheaval which rocked France over the events that followed. The jurisdiction of the Parliaments had been reduced and their importance curtailed with it. Making use of the double meaning of the word Parliament they had tried to persuade themselves and others that their importance corresponded to that of the English Houses of Parliament, and hence had made a specialty of politics. This was the chief reason why their judgments had been hasty and disgraceful. Now such judiciary murders would no longer occur. All cases where there was any doubt should hereafter be dismissed. The King was now thinking of abolishing the torture.

Maupeou not only had Voltaire's articles reprinted, but even enlarged by the insertion of statements Voltaire had used elsewhere as for instance in his attack upon the judges who "in our eyes are nothing but official murderers"; this expression had originally been used against the judges in the trial of La Barre. Maupeou did not scruple to use words which at the time Voltaire had written them were directed at himself.

The exile of the members of the Parliament could not stir Voltaire's pity. On February 25, 1771, he wrote to the Marquis de Florian: "Do the murderers of La Barre deserve pity because they now have to live in the country? I have had to live for seventeen years in the country, and I have murdered nobody."

Of great importance to progress in the administration of justice was the epoch-making speech deliv-

ered and published in 1766 by the attorney general Antoine de Servan, then only twenty-seven years old. It was inspired entirely by Voltaire's influence. This same year Servan had visited Voltaire in Ferney, and after that they kept up a steady correspondence. Servan fulfilled every hope Voltaire had placed in him. In the eyes of the other lawyers Servan's demands amounted to a complete revolution of the social order. He wished not only the abolishment of torture and capital punishment, but also any penalty whatsoever for religious transgressions; he even advocated the introduction of the system of trial by jury. He said that more important than the punishment of crime was its prevention, and as the best means of attaining that he acclaimed education.

9

In 1771 the newly formed Parliament of Toulouse handed down the final verdict on the Sirven case. The earlier verdict of 1769 which had merely put him *hors de cour* was reversed and the defendant was acquitted. The sentence imposed in her absence upon the deceased Madame Sirven was quashed and replaced by a complete exoneration of "the false and slanderous charge of murder."

Voltaire could rejoice in the victory won. He wrote: "It took only two hours to sentence this family to death. But it took nine years for the courts to make official acknowledgment of their innocence." The justice, however, was not perfect. Sirven's confiscated property was restored to him, to be sure, but he was not awarded the modest damages of 20,000 livres which he had demanded; and it is absurd that it was insisted that he should pay the costs of the first trial which had pronounced against him the sentence in default.

After the *coup d'état* Maupeou had occasion to take up again a trial which had been conducted in the most outrageous way under the old conditions. This awakened in various people the hope that the

new form of administration would provide greater fairness.

A man by the name of Montbailli was living with his wife in the house of his mother, who owned a tobacco factory. This was in St. Omer, in July, 1770. The young woman had formerly been a worker in the factory. The relations between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law were not good; the old woman considered her son's wife was neither rich enough nor beautiful enough for him. One day the old woman, who was a heavy drinker, obtained a court order demanding that the young couple leave the house. The son endeavored to patch things up with his mother, who lay drunk in bed, and he even managed to succeed in doing so. She got up, talked peacefully with her children, drank some more, and then went back to bed to sleep off her stupor. This was on July 27, 1770.

Next morning when a seamstress came to speak with the old woman, the son asked her to wait until his mother got up. But later when he tried to awaken her he was horrified to discover that she was dead. Everything indicated that she had died from a stroke. The neighbors came over to condole. On July 29, the body was put in the coffin to be buried, when suddenly in St. Omer the rumor arose that the children must have killed the old woman to keep from being put out.

The couple was arrested. Each, from his isolated cell, declared that the old woman had changed her mind, so that they were not in any danger. And the other inmates of the house testified that it had been very quiet all night long. But the court was under the pressure of public opinion, which, as Voltaire says, was in this case formed by the mob. Both husband and wife were for the time being kept in prison. The Royal attorney appealed to the higher court of the Province of Artois, which had Arras as capital and this court sentenced the man and his wife to death. But as Madame Montbailli was pregnant, her execution was postponed.

Montbailli was brought to St. Omer and immediately put to the severest torture which, however,

made him confess nothing, although Dominican monks threatened him with the direst punishments of Hell if he did not come out with his guilt. He also refused to plead guilty in his religious confession. When his right hand was cut off, he said: "This hand committed no matricide." When his extremities were broken and when he was tied to the wheel, he never ceased asserting his innocence. Then he was thrown alive into a fire.

There was still a chance to get the wife off. Voltaire got the lawyer de Taillis to send him the documents of the case, and wrote his work *La méprise d'Arras.* In the introduction he reviewed all recent judiciary murders in France and pointed out that Montbailli's trial had created no sensation, merely because it was a poor family of the common people; he hoped that never again would a sentence of this sort be imposed without weighty reasons.

The Royal Council heard his protest, granted the petition for a new trial, and as in the meantime the *coup d'état* had taken place and the court in Arras had been re-formed under the new order, Madame Montbailli was acquitted and her executed husband exonerated. At the same time the judge exhorted all court physicians to make use of every means their science provided for determining the cause of death by autopsy. When the widow returned to St. Omer the stupid, easily swayed temper of the people had changed, and her return to the city was like a triumphal procession.

10

It might seem as though Maupeou had succeeded in winning over public opinion, which had been so hostile to him and to his new Parliaments. The Princes of the Royal family could not hold out against the Crown for any length of time. The former members of the Parliaments had to give up their arrogant opposition, and many of them had asked to be accepted as members in the new courts. It was especially significant that the lawyers, who had resigned

at first, had now fallen into line. Voltaire, who took the part of the Chancellor, was so confident that on January 6, 1771, he wrote a letter to Madame du Deffand expressing his confident hope that in less than six weeks there would be no more talk about the *coup d'état* and everybody would be used to the new order. The new Parliaments, in passing the financial grant, showed a shameful submissiveness toward the power of the Crown.

Then it happened that a trial showed the new system of judiciary administration in the most unfavorable light, and aroused the public against the courts instituted by Maupeou and defended by Voltaire.

11

In the next big trial, one which undermined the new constitution in France so deeply that the entire social order became unbalanced, the defendant was the first intellectual successor of Voltaire, in a higher sense his only son, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. It was he who undermined the new legal system, of which Voltaire had expected such great things.

Since the year 1764 Beaumarchais, who was then thirty-two years old, had tried to come in touch with Voltaire. Unfortunately his letters have been lost, and as Voltaire on his side has left no written record of this early connection, we know it only from a letter Beaumarchais wrote from Madrid to a friend:

"I have received a letter from Monsieur de Voltaire. Jokingly he sends his best wishes to my thirty two sound teeth, my merry philosophy and my youth. His letter is very fine; but mine demanded this answer to a degree that I believe I could have written it myself. He would like some information about the land in which I am now. I would like most to give him the answer which Signor de Caro gave yesterday, at the house of Senor de Grimaldi, to the Marquise of Arissa. She asked him what he thought of Spain? —'Madame,' he said, 'I beg you permit me to postpone my answer until I am out of the country; I am

too honest and too polite to give the answer at the house of a Minister of the King.'"

Voltaire seems to have believed in Spain's intellectual enlightenment. In a letter to d'Alembert (March 25, 1765) he says that she was well on her way to throwing off the yoke of fanaticism and ignorance. A comment Beaumarchais wrote to the Duke La Vallière shows the case was different:

"One of the strongest impressions I received in the wonderful monastery (San Lorenzo, in Escurial) was the condemnation of nearly all of our modern philosophers, which was posted publicly near the monks' choir. There are listed the forbidden works and their authors, above all your friend, Voltaire. Not only the works he has already produced are condemned, but also the works he will create in the future, as only evil can flow from such a pen. I wrote to him from Bayonne, to deliver the messages given me by the Duke of Laval and yourself. He let three months go by without answering me, and finally sent the answer to Versailles assuming that I had returned and, as he said, being anxious not to get me in trouble with the Inquisition if I were to receive a letter from him in Spain; by accident the letter has reached me here just the same."

By a strange fate Voltaire, who was preëminently the one man in France to understand and appreciate Beaumarchais at once, found himself in the embarrassing position of wanting to think it over before he thanked him for the clever self-defense which Beaumarchais sent him. The cause of this was that Voltaire's contempt for the old Parliament had inevitably persuaded him to support the formation of the new ones. But Beaumarchais had to turn against the new Parliament. And that with such effectiveness and success in his suit against Goëzman that Paris was circulating the pun: Louis Quinze overthrew the old Parliament, and quinze Louis overthrew the new. This meant the fifteen louis d'ors Madame Goëzman had taken from Beaumarchais and kept.

From this reserve on Voltaire's part toward the promising younger genius, one must not be led to conclude that he felt a coolness toward Beaumar-

chais. He certainly did not begrudge him his abilities, over which he rejoiced; but he envied his right to be in Paris, from which he was excluded. Hence these words in a letter to Richelieu: "It is funny that a watchmaker's apprentice, for whose arrest a warrant has been issued, can stay in Paris, and not I." To the Marquis de Florian (who had married one of his nieces) he writes on January 3, 1774: "Beaumarchais' memoranda of defense are of all I ever read the strongest, keenest, most interesting, laughter-inducing and shameful to his adversary. He fights ten or twelve opponents simultaneously and knocks them down, like Harlequin when he gets wild and knocks down a whole night patrol."

Voltaire awaits with keen anticipation every new number of these memoranda, which also made such a deep impression upon Goethe. When he received the fourth memorandum, Voltaire wrote: "I have read Beaumarchais' fourth memorandum. I am still all stirred up, filled with it, amazed. Never before has the like been seen in a regular trial."

He immediately conceived the best opinion of the author, and when Beaumarchais' opponents countered with the charge that Beaumarchais had poisoned three wives, Voltaire did not believe it for a moment: nobody could convince him that such a brilliant and witty man was a poisoner.

Every letter Voltaire sent from Ferney was circulated all over Paris on its arrival, and became as well known as today a newspaper article printed in many thousand copies. One evening, when Beaumarchais' Eugenie was played at the Théâtre Français, a gentleman in the audience rose in his seat and spoke in a loud voice against the weakness of the play and also against the crimes of the author. He stated among other things, that at the house of Count d'Argental he had heard a letter from Voltaire in which the poet had insisted that Beaumarchais had not poisoned his three wives. "But," he concluded, "that is something that the members of the Parliament know to be a fact."

The one whom he had been addressing got up from his seat and said calmly:

"Monsieur, it is an established fact that this rogue has poisoned his three wives, although he has been married only twice. In Maupeou's Parliament it is also known that he ate his father-in-law in a meat pie, after crushing his own mother between two slices of bread and butter, and I know this the better as I myself am Beaumarchais. I would have you arrested now, as I have a number of witnesses to your words, if I could not see by your confused expression that you are not one of those treacherous fellows who make up these contemptible libels, but just one of those idiots who are in the habit of spreading them —not, incidentally, without some little danger to your own person."

12

The origin of the Beaumarchais trial, which fanned the hatred against the Chancellor into a blaze, was not political.

Pâris-Duverney, the third of the famous brothers, died on July 17, 1770. Beaumarchais had done him the great service of persuading Louis XV to visit the military academy founded by Madame de Pompadour. In return the banker wished to make Beaumarchais' fortune; he gave him large credits for his many undertakings and speculations.

Beaumarchais possessed a document to prove this, a paper outlining the nature of the complex transactions that had taken place unquestionably authentic and signed by Pâris-Duverney. The account showed a balance of 15,000 livres to the credit of Beaumarchais. Pâris-Duverney had further bound himself in this document to let the future dramatist have a loan of 75,000 livres for eight years, free of interest.

The Count de la Blache, who was the heir of the banker, although he recognized the signature as genuine, insisted that the sheet had been blank and that Beaumarchais had filled it out. Consequently he would neither make the loan nor pay the sum Beaumarchais had to his credit. He referred to the necessity of the document's being drawn up in two copies,

but stated that the other copy could not be found among Duverney's papers.

Nevertheless the document was declared valid and authentic on February 22, 1772.

La Blache appealed to the Parliament of Paris, where the case came up in March, 1773.

To Beaumarchais' great disadvantage, Count Saint-Florentin had put him in prison because of an unfortunate quarrel with the Duke de Chaulnes over a love affair. This arrest was the more unjust in that Beaumarchais and the Duke had both been acquitted in this affair by the Marshals of France, whose court had jurisdiction in a quarrel between noblemen. The arbitrary imprisonment prevented him from conducting in person his trial before the Parliament.

Thus the Count de la Blache had a chance to slander Beaumarchais and to start the rumor about the three poisoned wives.

On April 6, 1773, the Parliament reversed the decision in his favor of February 22, 1772, declared the document signed by Duverney invalid and forged, and sentenced Beaumarchais to a fine far in excess of all he possessed.

When in May he was discharged from prison, an absolutely ruined man, a third trial threatened him, the verdict in which, if unfavorable, would have meant his sentence to the galley.

13

It was of especial importance for Beaumarchais to speak with the judge who was to preside at his trial. This was the Parliament Councillor, Louis Goëzman. In his second marriage he had acquired a pretty young wife, who had been heard to say without a blush that a generous client, whose case was good and who did not ask anything wrong, did not offend her finer feelings by a present. She said it was impossible for her to live on the income of her husband, and that she knew the art of plucking a chicken without making it cry.

Goëzman's publisher, Lejay, who had often heard

the woman speak in this manner, being told that Beaumarchais was desperate and had tried in vain to get an interview with the judge, gave Beaumarchais a hint that to assure one's self of Goëzman's "love of justice" there was nothing else to do but to pay the young woman a gratuity which was estimated at one hundred louis d'or. This amount Beaumarchais sent to Lejay, who gave it to Madame Goëzman. The defendant, however, obtained only a very short audience.

To be admitted to a second and longer interview, Beaumarchais had again to approach the wife of the councillor, who this time demanded and got a diamond-studded watch valued at another one hundred louis d'or for "her husband's secretary." But she had Lejay guarantee that if no further interview were granted, Beaumarchais was to be returned the one hundred louis d'or as well as the watch.

As the second audience was refused, and as Goëzman spoke before the Parliament in favor of la Blache, these gifts were returned as agreed upon; only the fifteen louis d'or for the secretary were withheld.

But Beaumarchais demanded these fifteen louis d'or also as he learned that the secretary had never seen one of the fifteen.

Madame Goëzman refused to return the money, and Beaumarchais wrote her a letter accusing her of having appropriated it. This was a clever move; for now Beaumarchais put all his bets on a single card. He hoped to be able to prove his suspicion that Goëzman had been bribed by La Blache, and he saw a chance of attaining in this way the quashing of the sentence.

Madame Goëzman denied having received the fifteen louis d'or; she said the defendant had offered her money in vain, in an effort to influence her husband's vote.

Beaumarchais could save himself only by appealing to public opinion and showing how the events had actually taken place, and this he did in a brilliant way.

Even if Goëzman in the beginning had not known

anything about his wife's action, he must have become aware of it very soon. He felt his career as a judge and man of honor threatened, and he therefore left no means unemployed. First he appealed to the police; but when the police commissioner refused to issue a *lettre de cachet* against Beaumarchais he persuaded the publisher Lejay to publish a dishonest report written by Goëzman himself, stating that the defendant had implored Lejay to go to Madame Goëzman and try to get her to accept a bribe which she had declined at once.

On the basis of this false evidence Goëzman reported Beaumarchais to the Parliament for attempted bribery and for libel. That his wife had kept the fifteen louis d'or he concealed, of course. He got his friend Francois Marin, the Royal Censor, to go to see Beaumarchais and try to persuade him to drop the quarrel over the wretched fifteen louis d'or.

Beaumarchais was too clever to do any such thing. He knew that this trifling three hundred and sixty francs was the key point in the case he was building up for himself. His position was wretched enough from the start, as the verdict of the La Blache trial had disgraced him. The judges would naturally do everything to save their colleague. Beaumarchais could not even find a lawyer to take his case, so that the President or the Parliament was forced to assign one to him. As Beaumarchais could place no confidence in Parliament he bent all his genius to the problem of submitting his case to the judgment of the reading public, and here he won his trial so brilliantly that he became the darling of the French people.

14

The importance of the four *Mémoirs*, which Beaumarchais published (1774-1778) in connection with his trial, is the fact that in them the future author of *Figaro* raised the question: was the private citizen who had no powerful protector without defense against the arbitrariness and partiality of the courts? And he hardly considered the question whether the new Parliaments were any better than the old. Beau-

marchais revealed, as Voltaire had done before him, the tricks and subterfuges which the administration of justice employed, and like Voltaire he struck at the roots of the tyranny under which the population was suffering. In its haughtiness the Parliament had been so careless as to overlook the possibility that among those it injured there might be a genius capable of taking revenge.

For the first time, in Beaumarchais' *Mémoirs,* a defendant revealed the mysteries of the secret investigation, and acquainted the public with everything that happened to him. This man was so clever in his attack that it was impossible to punish him for the mockery with which he inundated his judges. Ostensibly he had the most profound devotion to them.

Among other things he proved concerning the men who had accused him of having poisoned his wives, was that one, Goëzman, was a forger who, to deny the paternity of his bastard child, had forged a birth certificate; and he demonstrated that another, Marin, was the boldest grafter in his official position. Marin had been entrusted with the supervision of the Distribution of pamphlets in defense of Maupeou; nevertheless he had, when he saw in it a profit, distributed pamphlets directly opposed to the Chancellor. Often he let a poor book-agent who peddled writings be sent to the galleys, but he himself profited by the secret sale of confiscated political or philosophical books.

After the publication of the second memorandum Voltaire wrote: "What a man! He embraces in himself: intellect, earnestness, reason, humor, energy. He knows how to appeal to the feelings. In short, he is successful in every kind of eloquence. He destroys his opponents and routs his judges; I can excuse all of his carelessnesses and all his violence." And after the fourth memorandum Voltaire writes to the Marquis de Florian: 'I know of no comedy more brilliantly amusing, no tragedy more deeply touching, no story more gripping. . . . Goëzman is dragged in the mud; but Marin is still more deeply bogged."

Beaumarchais was resolved to commit suicide if

the Parliament should impose upon him the penalty which was to be expected, the galleys. For, the Parliament could sentence him to any one of the following penalties: rebuke, disgraceful rebuke, a fine, the pillory, branding, the galleys for life. The resentment of the Parliament was so great that it would have preferred to give him the most severe penalty. But they were forced to pay consideration to clearly expressed public opinion.

It was decided to punish Beaumarchais by a "disgraceful rebuke," which would cause him to be dishonored so that he forfeited, not only all his offices and titles, but also all his rights of citizenship. His four memoranda were, "because of their bold and disrespectful tone which insulted the dignity of the Court as a whole and some of its members in particular," to be torn up by the hangman at the foot of the great stairway of the Palace of Justice and thrown in the fire.

But the reputation of the court had fallen so low that though the books were burned, it was not dared to carry out the sentence against Beaumarchais. He was neither arrested nor subjected to the humiliation to which he had been condemned, of having to kneel in public and listen to the reading of the rebuke. When the gallery heard the sentence pronounced they spit at the judges and rushed at them with such violence that the members had to flee the palace by secret ways to escape the rage of the populace.

The Duke de Chartres gave a splendid feast in Beaumarchais' honor.

The Prince of Conti, descendant of the great Condé, who had commanded in Italy, had accomplished the crossing of the Alps, conquered Château-Dauphin, won the battle of Coni and taken the Austrian fort at Mons, of whom Voltaire had written:

> Conti, qu'on censurait et que l'univers loue,
> Est un autre Annibal qui n'a point de Capoue.

this Prince wrote Beaumarchais: "I believe I am from a good enough family to set France an example for how a great citizen should be honored."

15

Voltaire was now in his eighties; but he had never been more active, never planned so many undertakings. His strength of mind had not only not lessened with the years, but was greater than ever before. It is like a memory from Voltaire's youth when Frederick, who in the course of years was again and again overwhelmed with love and admiration for the idol of his youth, calls him the God of Taste. Voltaire was now primarily a man of action. Nevertheless, Frederick's letter of February, 1773, deserves to be mentioned here:

"I am in receipt of your letter and your charming verses which contradict your age. No, I cannot believe your words. You are either still young, or you have learned how to clip the wings of time.

"It is foolhardy to try to answer you in verse; but you know that people of my stamp often take liberties that would not be approved of in others. A certain Cotys, King of a very barbaric country, entered into a correspondence with Ovid when the latter was exiled to Tomi. It must therefore be permitted to a modern ruler of a less barbaric country to write to the Apollo of Ferney.

From 1770-1777 Voltaire fights with cunning caution, but with persistent and persuasive clearness, for the abolition of the serfdom in his region at the foot of the Jura mountains. In the years 1784-1789 Beaumarchais, with Condorcet, undertook an edition of Voltaire's works in seventy volumes (in Kehl, as Voltaire was not permitted to be published in France), an edition on which, thanks to unfavorable conditions, he lost one million francs. In it he wrote an introduction to some of Voltaire's writings which are concerned with his fight for the serfs, from which can be seen that in spite of the old master's eloquence everything remained unchanged as long as he was alive. Only the revolution freed these slaves.

By employing old falsified documents the Benedictine monks, who had become proprietors of the territory between the Jura mountains and Saint-

Claude, had enslaved the inhabitants. When, in 1742, the estates of these monks became civil property, the prebendaries of Saint-Claude fell heir to them, and the residents of the village now lived in serfdom in various respects.

They were unable to dispose of their property in favor of their children, unless these children had always lived in their father's house and eaten at his table. Otherwise everything became the property of the monks, and the son had to beg at the door of the house his father had built. The monks, though they took the father's property, did not assume his debts.

Anyone who rented a house within the province of the monks, and stayed for one year and one day, remained their serf. It happened that a French merchant, a man with a family, came to this region on business and rented a house for one year. When he died, in a different province of France, his widow and his children were surprised by a visit of the bailiffs, who on the authority of a royal warrant, carted away their furniture, sold it and drove them out of the house.

Voltaire tried first of all to demonstrate that since the right of the monks was based on forged documents, it must be declared invalid; from this, his next step would be to persuade the Crown to abolish serfdom. His demonstration that the tyranny of the prebendaries had no legal foundation was irrefutable; but it made not the slightest dent in the stubborn conservatism of those in the seat of power; his efforts to abolish serfdom were shattered on the rock of the ecclesiastical power.

He spoke not in his own name, but (like Paul Louis Courier a generation later) in the name of the poor inhabitants, and not his name but those of their representatives are signed to his petition.

They were 12,000 poor people, serfs in Longchaumais, Morez, Morbier, Belle-Fontaine, Les Rousses, and Bois d'Amont; for centuries they suffered in silence. Now Voltaire's voice gave them a means of expression but this voice spent itself in vain.

The local chapter of the monastic order was com-

pelled to pay the physician and pharmacist of these slaves. In April, 1770, a surgeon of Morez, by the name of Nicod, asked for his fee, and was answered by the agent of the chapter: "Instead of paying you the chapter should punish you; last year you cured two serfs by whose deaths my clients would have profited a thousand francs."

In half of Franche-Comté which was annexed to France in 1678, the "dead hand" was the ruling principle. The inhabitants were, as they were called, *mainmortables.* When a free man went to live with a wife who was *mainmortable,* he too became a serf. Likewise the other way round, when a woman married a serf. When a father and son were not on good terms and separated so that they lived in different places, or even when they possessed separate property in the same house, the chapter fell heir to their property when they died.

Voltaire wrote in vain: "The ghosts flee when the day dawns; the dead hand should disappear when reason and justice awaken."

Especially well written and effective is his *La voix du Curé,* in which the village priest tells how the prebendaries had robbed a woman, Jeanne Marie Mermet, of her entire inheritance from her father, on the grounds that she had spent her wedding night under her husband's roof.

Here he shows how it had long been known that the whole legend of the proprietary rights of the chapter was based on forged documents, on a large number of brazen lies which were invented in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Voltaire's dramatic gift is visible again in the two petitions of the reverend Father Polycarpe and of a Benedictine monk of Franche-Comté, both of which speak enthusiastically of the existing conditions and praise the benefactions of serfdom, while they quote with horror passages like the following by the historian Mézerei concerning France: "Freedom is so great in this noble monarchy that even the air imparts it to everybody who breathes it. The Majesty of our noble Kings is so high-minded that they refuse to be the rulers of people who are not free."

As Louis XV had remained deaf to all of Voltaire's pleas for the freedom of the serfs, so did Louis XVI after him refuse to interfere, although the number of the serfs had increased.

Voltaire's last petition, in 1777, just a year before his death, is addressed to this King. The *Requête au Roi pour les serfs de Saint-Claude* begins:

"Twenty thousand men, the fathers of families, the men who till the soil of your two Burgoyne Provinces or serve in Your Majesty's army, throw themselves at Your feet. Particularly those of us who are the slaves of various abbeys and monastic orders, thanks to an abuse that is based on forged documents, ask with laments and tears if we may not belong to Your Majesty. We wish to be under Your Crown, whose rights were usurped in the Dark Ages by means of the forgeries of an order of monks."

This last petition went, like all the others, into the waste basket. But before a dozen more years had passed there came a bloody retribution for this disregard of the voice of reason and justice.

16

Among the many cases in which Voltaire, in his last years, raised his voice in defense of those who were accused though innocent, and brutally condemned to death, we must not fail to mention the case of General Lally who was executed in 1766.

In the spring of 1773, his son, the young Count de Lally-Tollendal, approached Voltaire with the request that he help him in securing the re-instatement of his father's honor.

Voltaire had known the General personally, as a close friend of the Duke de Richelieu. He had been painfully surprised by the sentence and the execution of Lally. He found it impossible to believe that he had been guilty of any crime, as he looked up all that had been written on the subject of the General's trial. Even before he knew the details of the case, he wrote to Damilaville, on June 13, 1766:

"As regards Lally, I am absolutely convinced that

he was no traitor, and that it was not his fault that he could not hold Pondichêry. The Parliament could not sentence him to death except on a charge of treachery. It would be interesting to know exactly what form of treachery he was found to have committed. France, as I wrote you not long ago, is the only country in which no explanation is furnished for a sentence; also it is the only country in which one can purchase the right to judge his fellow-men."

Count Thomas Arthur de Lally came of an Irish family which had gone to France with James II. He had served in the French army with the greatest distinction. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War it was feared in France that the English would surprise the French colonies in East India, and troops were sent to support the East Indian Company. These were put under the command of Lally; besides he was given unlimited power over the officials and military forces of the Company. He landed in Pondichéry in April, 1758, and as he heard that the English had taken possession of Chandernagoe, he marched against them, conquered and destroyed Fort St. David, and captured Devicottah. Thirty-eight days after his arrival he had driven all the English from the Coromandel coast.

He had not, however, been sufficiently provided, either with men or money. His main force consisted of entirely undependable natives; he was left without any supplies, while Count d'Aché, the Admiral of the French fleet which was supposed to support him, left him in the lurch time and again, out of jealousy. The directors of the Company in France had asked him to cure the evils that had arisen out of the greed and dishonesty of the officials in India. One can appreciate that his interference earned him the hatred of these officials. They put as many obstacles in the way of his plans and investigations as they could.

Lally, being a man of violent temper, had openly shown the governor Duval de Leyrit his dissatisfaction and had sent complaints about him to the King, because he gave him absolutely no support. The governor, of course, became his mortal enemy. Lally

besieged in vain the city of Tanjur, whose Rajah refused to pay the Company the thirteen millions he owed it. He had to retreat to Pondichéry.

Although the fleet refused coöperation, the General found it important to take possession of Madras, and as the East Indian Company at the instigation of the governor refused to grant any money for this, he contributed 156,000 livres from his own pocket. He took possession of all the posts in the vicinity of Arcot that were occupied by the English, and thereafter the city itself.

Now the Marquis de Bussy, who had the command of the Company's troops, declared that he would no longer take orders from Lally. The Royal troops alone remained faithful to him. Nevertheless he marched against Madras and took possession of the so-called black city which was inhabited by merchants of all races. The English withdrew to Fort St. George. But after the victory when Lally's undisciplined troops were drinking, plundering, burning, ravishing and murdering, the English surprised them. Lally, however, succeeded in rallying them, and was even about to cut the English off from this retreat, when Bussy left him in the lurch. Lally tried to storm the fort; but six English war ships, which Count d'Aché had allowed to slip through, arrived so that the siege of St. George had to be given up and a retreat to Pondichéry be made, where lack of money ruined everything.

The troops, not drawing any pay, mutinied; Lally gave everything he possessed to pay them, but it was in vain. In 1760, the English surrounded the city on land and water; in January, 1761, Lally had to surrender, and the bitterness of the population against the bed-ridden General was so great that the English had to protect him from the rage of his country-men. On the boat which brought him as a prisoner to England he was treated by the English very unworthily.

17

In London he heard that his opponents were slandering him to the French Ministry. He asked if he

might be excused from his parole and allowed to cross to France to clear himself of these accusations.

Here he found the public predisposed against him. Not only hatred and resentment over their money losses filled his enemies. They felt that it was now a question of either him or them. If Lally should succeed in demonstrating that not he, but his untruthful, unscrupulous subordinates were to blame for the loss of Pondichéry, then the others were in danger of being made one head shorter apiece by the outcome of the trial. Consequently they employed every trick that human meanness fighting for its existence can devise for a man's ruin.

He was accused of having used extortion upon French subjects in India, of misappropriating public funds, and of high treason, and this by judges who knew so little of Indian conditions that they often confused a city with a person and a person with a city. Voltaire justly said that everyone must realize that Lally's voluntary return to France spoke for his innocence. But he was sentenced in advance.

He asked in vain that counsel be assigned to him; his defense was left entirely to himself, regardless of his protest that the question here was not a single matter like murder or theft, but a great number of facts, by the aid of which he wanted to justify his leadership in India and which he could not possibly have at hand without help.

The General wrote a first brief in his defense. To cut off the possibility of his publishing several of these, Pasquier, the presiding judge, speeded up the hearings from four sessions a week to two a day.

The judges did not agree at once; two were for the death sentence, three against it. They wrangled at great length; one of the three finally yielded with the words: "Oh, let him die, then, so we can get the business over with!"

The General was pronounced guilty of having betrayed the interests of the King, of the State and of the Indian Company, of having oppressed the King's subjects in Pondichéry and of having extorted money from them. His property went to the King, who promptly informed the Parliament that he had no

intention of exercising his privilege of granting a pardon.

An unsuccessful attempt at suicide was given as the reason for tying Lally's hands behind him as he rode on the rear of a cart to the scaffold. For fear that he might assert his innocence to the crowd, a gag was put in his mouth. The executioner missed the first blow; the head fell at the second. From the enemies of the General, who surrounded the scaffold, came a cry: "Would that he had missed twenty times!"

In the thirty-fourth chapter of the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* Voltaire had, in 1768, given an account of the trial and execution of Lally, which unequivocally accused the Parliament of judiciary murder. The general resentment called forth by this account made it out of the question for him to think of trying to secure a restitution of the General's honor. Now, in spite of his eighty years and of his weakened health, he put all his strength at the disposal of the son. However, there was small reason to hope that Maupeou who had been one of those to sentence the General to the block, would now be willing to listen to his son. Voltaire therefore told Count Lally-Tollendal that it was of the first importance to assure himself the favor of the Chancellor, and not to attack any one of the still powerful enemies of his father, but merely to justify the deceased.

In April, 1773, the young Count asked Voltaire for his aid. It was in August that the eighty-year-old man sent his friends the first copies of his admirable book *Fragments historiques sur l'Inde et sur le général Lally.*

He was convinced that nobody in France was interested in a man who had been executed seven years ago and whose reputation was still entirely in the power of his enemies. He was convinced that the only practical course was, not to bring a lawsuit, but to publish a literary work which might arouse public interest.

No novel could have been more new and fascinating to French readers of that day; but at the same time, no ethnological treatise could have been more authoritative. Full of spirit and passion, Voltaire re-

futed the silly fairy tales which were in circulation about the inhabitants of the far East and about their customs.

One has read four big sheets of the book before General Lally gets to Pondichéry. Then his battles and his accomplishments are described, his misfortunes in which he himself is blameless and finally the unjust trial. But as if this had not been what Voltaire was driving at, there follow almost a hundred pages describing Indian conditions, giving information about Indian mythology and the Indian belief in the transmigration of souls, and telling the history of India from Tamerlaine to modern times.

Voltaire made his work a book of entertainment for educated Frenchmen, and at the same time persuaded them, without their noticing it, that Lally's death sentence had been an infamy.

18

From the moment Maupeou dissolved the former Parliament of Paris, Voltaire persisted in the idea that the La Barre trial should be revised by the new Parliament. He learned from a Prussian officer who had visited him in Ferney that the young Gaillard Tollendal had entered the army of Frederick the Great, under the name of Morival, and that he was in Wesel.

At the time he was planning to induce the *philosophes* to settle in Cleve it had been his intention to give Tollendal a position in the colony. Now he started to correspond with him, without revealing his name, and using a Dutch address. Then he strongly recommended him to King Frederick. The King knew, as Voltaire expressed it to Tollendal, that he "had done nothing worse than to laugh in the country of the monkeys and that the monkeys wanted to tear him to pieces for that." The King promoted Morival from a sergeantcy to a commission and promised besides to look after him further.

The sentence made Tollendal civilly a dead man in France; his mother's inheritance had been con-

fiscated. If he were to recover his rights of citizenship he would first have to get a Royal letter of pardon. But to obtain this would require several months of residence in France. Voltaire therefore asked King Frederick for a leave of absence for the young officer so the latter could come to Ferney to talk over the best plan of procedure with his protector.

Frederick found Voltaire's hopes fantastic. King Louis, who had had La Barre executed, could not pardon Tollendal without contradicting himself, because he had been sentenced for the same misdemeanor as La Barre.

In the meantime the young man arrived, in April, 1774, in Ferney. Voltaire was enthusiastic over him. He sent Frederick a glowing description. The more Voltaire thought about the case the more amazed he was at the sentence against Tollendal. He wrote on April 26, 1774, to the King: "There is nothing else against him except that, with his hat on his head, at a distance of 40 paces, and very rapidly, he passed a procession of monks, and that along with several other young men he sang a hundred-year-old obscene ballad." Had Tollendal not required a Royal letter of Pardon to restore his right of inheritance, Voltaire would never have advised him to "humiliate himself so deeply as to apologize to a set of mad barbarians."

Frederick saw more clearly than Voltaire. He knew that satisfaction could never be obtained for Tollendal Morival under that government. He wrote on May 15, 1774, from Potsdam:

"Morival is obliged to you to the highest degree. Without knowing him, you take every pains to make his innocence manifest; in apology for the barbarity of the sentences with which your native land has persecuted one whose offense cannot be given any worse name than frivolity, you have generously tried to protect him. Once more you come forward as the protector of the oppressed, and the avenger of injustice. But despite your good intentions, it is not going to be easy to obtain a pardon for the young man. Regardless of what progress philosophy may make, stupidity and bigotry will always find their roost in the Church, and the name of the Infamy will always

remain the trumpet that assembles the feeble-minded and those who have been bitten by the passion to save their neighbor's souls. Naturally, in the land of 'the most Christian King,' every vassal must be most Christian; and never will one be able to avoid making obeissance and kneeling before that lump of dough, which is worshipped as a god. The only way in which Morival could obtain a pardon would be for him to do public penance before a church door, let himself be whipped by monks at the foot of the main altar, and finally become a monk himself."

19

It was not of his own resolution that Louis XV had dissolved the Parliaments. Madame du Barry had been trained to say to the King every time a provincial Parliament sent deputies to him: "Again, people who want to abolish the royal power and who come to dethrone you." A life-size portrait of Charles I of England, by Van Dyck was bought at a cost of 24,000 francs for Madame du Barry, so she could hang it in her apartment where the King would have it daily before his eyes. Again and again she said to Louis: "France! Do you see that picture? If you let your Parliament make decisions, it will one day cut off your head, as the English Parliament did to Charles I."

It harmed the reputation of Maupeou and of the new Parliament that the Chancellor sought support from this woman who drank from the punch spoon and put it back in the bowl. One day, when the King reproached her for making the others drink her spittle, she answered: "Exactly! I want them all to drink my spittle."

In the last days of April, 1774, Louis took a walk with the Countess in the vicinity of Trianon. They saw a little herd-girl, gathering grass for her cow, and they found her eyes exceptionally pretty. They approached her, took off her bonnet, shoved her hair out of her face, and agreed that she would be very attractive if she were dressed as a lady.—"Then let's

dress her!"—The little farmer girl, with paint and beauty-patches, was brought before the King. She was charming.—"She shall have supper with us."—They had supper, joked, drank, only too much. The girl was given a bath and put to bed.

Meanwhile her brother died from smallpox; the next day she, too, fell ill and died. An epidemic had broken out in the vicinity.

On April 28 the King did not feel well. The next day he was cupped several times but his headache would not cease. On April 30 it was seen that he was sick with the smallpox. On May 3, after a conference in the evening with the Archbishop of Paris, the King said to Madame du Barry: "Madame, I am ill; I know what I have to do. I want no more such scenes as in Metz. We must separate. Go to Ruel, to the Duke d'Aiguillon. Be assured that I shall always cherish the heartiest friendship for you."

On May 10 Louis died, and this death seemed to Voltaire at first to confirm the pessimism of Frederick. For Louis XVI was as pious as his grandfather and great-grandfather, Louis XV and Louis XIV. But certain traits of tolerance and humanity seemed to crop out at his ascension of the throne. The King appointed Turgot Minister, and when the bigots at Court informed him in horror that Turgot was an encyclopedist, he replied: "Just the same he is an honest man, and that is all I ask."

In the first days of August, 1774, Voltaire took hope again and sent Maupeou another petition for a letter of pardon for Tollendal, asking the Chancellor at the same time not to mention the name of Voltaire, as this would arouse resistance.

But on August 24 Maupeou was overthrown and, what seemed still more disastrous to Voltaire's scheme was the announcement that the new courts were dissolved and the old Parliaments would be reestablished, the Jansenists had convinced the King that the entire population longed for the old Parliaments. On October 2, 1774, an edict was issued which called these back to life.

True, the edict introduced a few limitations of the arbitrary power of the old Parliaments; but these

meant nothing, however, beside the insolence with which the parliamentarians again took their seats. Maupeou foresaw the coming revolution when his work was destroyed. He exclaimed: "If the King wants to risk his crown, he is free, of course, to do so." Now the office of judge was again purchasable and the abuse of fees again became customary. Also the abolishing of the torture and the reform of criminal law, which had been looked for at a change of kings, did not take place.

20

Voltaire knew perfectly well that the reëstablished Parliament would oppose his efforts for Tollendal. Nevertheless he was too stubborn to drop the matter. He persuaded the Duchess d'Enville to influence the Minister Maurepas in favor of the innocent man. He induced Frederick to give the young man, through his regimental commander, a splendid reference. As he himself could not take any steps in Paris, whence he was permanently exiled, and as his faithful friend and follower Damilaville as well as his faithless friend Thiriot had died, he asked d'Alembert to do something about the matter. D'Alembert agreed, but was very little fit for it; as Grimm said, d'Alembert was a philanthropist, but he got no pleasure out of it; and consequently, no success.

For fear that he might overlook something that might make trouble later on, Voltaire now wanted to read all documents of the case. The Marquis de Condorcet, later so famous a scholar, secured a complete copy of the documents.

Frederick, who on this occasion was willing to meet every reasonable request of Voltaire, after receiving the outline of the petition that was to be submitted to Louis XVI, ordered his Chancellor to get Prussian scholars of jurisprudence to write an opinion of the case. This was done. But when Voltaire approached the most prominent lawyers in Paris and, without mentioning the injustice of the Parliament, asked a statement that the entire procedure in the La Barre trial had been illegal because

the miserable pork merchant Broutel had presided as judge, they all, without exception, declined. They feared, despite all precautions, to arouse the Parliament against themselves. Voltaire wrote to d'Argental:

"The innocently shed blood cries to heaven, and I, too, am crying and shall do so until my death. I implore and conjure you, as a friend of Turgot and of Elie de Beaumont, to tell them that I am overwhelmed with despair. What! Tollendal in the year 1775 is unable to find a lawyer, while in 1766 the young people accused on the same charge with him found eight! This is terrible, incomprehensible. There seems to be neither any reason nor any humanity in the world!"

The lawyers could not be moved. In June, 1775, Voltaire published his pamphlet *Cri du sang innocent,* in which he recommends the case of Tollendal warmly to Louis XVI, and in which he apparently lets the young man speak for himself.

Voltaire's pamphlet is especially interesting in its discussion of evidence. It gives us some idea of the blood-thirsty malice of the judges who sentenced Tollendal. He declares, for instance, that he had never touched the crucifix on the Pont-Neuf in Abbeville, either with a scabbard or with a cane: "I answer not only that the charge is false but that it involves an impossibility. At that time I never carried a cane, but a little switch. The crucifix, as everybody in Abbeville knows, stood very high, on a heavy, eight foot pedestal; it was, therefore, impossible for anyone to reach high enough to strike the figure."

All the guilt of Parliament was wisely put on Duval de Soicourt and Broutel. But neither cleverness nor indignation made any impression upon Louis XVI's dull mind. All the result of this publication, was the pardon of Tollendal thirteen years later, in 1788, the year before the outbreak of the revolution.

21

In spite of the sentence of disgrace which had been imposed on Beaumarchais but never executed, he

had during the lifetime of Louis XV and the first years of the reign of Louis XVI enjoyed the extraordinary confidence of both Kings, as their agent abroad. He saw that now the moment for the reinstatement of his honor had come, for he had done more than anyone else to overthrow Maupeou and his new Parliament.

The old Parliament was inclined to criticize the courts recently dissolved, and as Beaumarchais was so clever as to engage Target, the only lawyer who had never been willing to conduct a trial before the Parliament of Maupeou, he won, in September, 1776, the complete restoration of his rights of citizenship.

A similar triumph for one of the unjustly sentenced whose advocate Voltaire had been, was achieved a year and a half later. The most violent opposition of the Parliament had been stirred up by the petition filed with the Conseil for quashing of the death sentence imposed upon General Lally. This petition demonstrated that the General was denied any defense. No less opposition greeted the filing of Lally-Tollendal's well-written memorandum. But the chairman of the Parliament, Pasquier, had been so crushed by Voltaire's *Fragments historiques sur l'Inde* that he humiliated himself by an attempt to justify himself in a letter to the patriarch. The latter answered prudently: "The best we two can do at our age is to forgive"; nevertheless he did not yield an inch from his intention to win the acquittal of the General; he also knew quite well that Pasquier had gone to the greatest trouble to influence the King to refuse the petition. Nothing happened, until the storm Voltaire's personal arrival aroused in Paris in 1778 overwhelmed the Conseil and made further resistance impossible. The hearings had required thirty-two sessions. Finally the Conseil unanimously quashed the judgment against Lally. This took place on May 26. Voltaire lay on his deathbed. He dictated a letter to the Count de Lally-Tollendal, the last lines he wrote:

> The dying man is revived at learning this wonderful piece of news; tenderly, he embraces M. de

Lally; he sees that the King is the protector of justice: now he can die content.

Four days later he was no more.

22

One would fill volumes if one should try to describe everything the eighty-two-year-old man did and wrote in the last years of his life to attain justice for the down-trodden. But anyone can read his *Memorandum for the complete abolition of Serfdom in France,* addressed to Turgot, his other numerous petitions to Turgot to free the county of Gex in his neighborhood from the terrible squeezing to which it was subjected, his protests against the slavery in which the inhabitants of the two valleys of the Jura mountains, Chézeri and Lelex, were held, his attack of the cruel folly of the tax-farming system, the useless crowd of officials it afforded, the injustice which was exercised in the disproportion between tax ability and assessment.

23

Most instructive and valuable is Voltaire's epoch-making book *Prix de la justice et de l'humanité* 1777.

The *Gazette de Berne* of February 15, 1777, had run the following notice: A philanthropist who desires to remain anonymous, has offered the Economic Society of Berne 50 louis d'ors as a prize for the best essay on the jurisdiction of criminal cases; competitors must take three points into consideration: Proportion between crime and penalty, the efficacy of proofs and of surmises, and the best means of facilitating the speedy and fair conviction and punishment or acquittal and release of the suspect on trial, in order that society may enjoy the greatest possible safety, and that freedom and humanity be respected.

Another anonymous donor, Voltaire, added 50 louis d'ors to the premium, but was not content with this.

After only eight months he published the work whose formal intention was a guide for those who wanted to enter the contest; its real importance, however, lay in his annihilating criticism of the French criminal law then in force.

He shows himself surprisingly modern, requests, for instance, oral trial by jury instead of the unexplained judgments by the Parliaments. He abhors the principle of revenge in criminal law. For him it is more important to prevent crimes than to punish them. Regarding the infractions of property laws, he points out that these are committed most frequently by the poor, while the laws are made by the rich, and that it would be better to remove the necessity of begging, than to deliver the beggar to the executioner. As for moral delinquencies, it would be better to protect the lives of the newborn by erecting foundling homes, instead of punishing cruelly the child-murder of the despairing mother.

He enlarges upon the injustice of inflicting the same heavy penalty for minor and graver crimes as when, both he who steals a little money and he who murders for money are broken upon the wheel. This amounts to an invitation to commit the worse crime, as the penalty is the same and the safety far greater, because the murdered man cannot say by whom he was attacked.

The existence of a death penalty for household theft is both barbaric and foolish; the way it works is that the average employer, not being blood-thirsty, is content to discharge the dishonest servant, who is left free immediately to go on stealing somewhere else.

As was to be expected, Voltaire demonstrates most emphatically the idiocy of the belief that the entertaining of so-called heretical notions represented a crime against God and therefore deserved a painful death. Voltaire cites the case of sorcery: more than a hundred thousand witches and sorcerers were condemned to die at the stake, all to no avail; sorcery persisted; but when at last the Christian courts abolished the burning of necromancers, sorcery promptly disappeared. He is shocked when he thinks

of the far greater number of executed heretics who were no more guilty than those sorcerers. Europe stands before him an immense scaffold, occupied by executioners and victims, surrounded by judges and spectators.

He explains the folly of a penalty for mere words, either spoken or written. If words do not lead directly to some criminal action, they are nothing more than empty talk. The press and literature should therefore enjoy perfect freedom.

In detail he argues the barbarity of punishing sexual crimes. He finds that abnormal sexual relations between adults are not matters for the courts to judge. To punish them at the stake is medieval. Bigamy, which was punished with such severe penalties, is in several countries no crime at all.

He draws a general distinction between what is really criminal by its own nature, and what is made a crime by conditions and circumstances (as, for instance during a war). During a civil war he who remains true to an unsuccessful king is called a traitor.

When La Barre said that he did not want to worship a god made of dough, he committed a purely local crime. For, England's Chancellor was permitted to say the same in the presence of the entire Parliament, and go free.

Passionately Voltaire attacks the ecclesiastical monitories which were used to force men to become informers by intimidating them with the threat of punishment in the next world. One is threatened with Hell, if one does not want to put one's neighbor's life in danger.

In order that his suggestions should not be rejected as impractical dreams, he proves that they were all actually put in practice in other times and places.

Among the Romans witnesses were questioned publicly and in the presence of the defendant. He could answer them, could question them and could hire a lawyer to represent him in opposing them. "This procedure was noble, free, and breathed Roman great-heartedness."

In England the defendant enjoys the protection of the law. The Englishman, who has the reputation of being harsh, is humane in his jurisprudence, the French, whose customs are considered soft, are really far from humane.

In the section on torture, Voltaire expresses his indignation over the fact that Christian priests and monks employ torture as their last argument. Neither Caligula nor Nero dared to employ it on a Roman citizen; only slaves were tortured, and Quintilian criticized even this, saying that they, too, were people.

Proudly Voltaire points to one happy result of his influence, though without saying one word about his own part in it. In the immense Russian Empire, torture is forbidden. It is abolished in the states reigned over by the Hero of the Century, the King of Prussia and in the countries governed by the Austro-Hungarian Empress-Queen. The just and good landgrave of Hesse has forbidden it. It is not allowed in England.

Voltaire finds one historical instance in which torture was justified: this was Ravaillac, who had murdered Voltaire's hero, Henry IV. In that case it was of importance to learn who his conspirators were.

Thereupon follows the criticism of marriage laws, of the barbaric penalties for adultery committed by the wife, while adultery on the husband's part is regarded as a bagatelle. Voltaire shows how the indissolubility of marrige within the Roman Catholic Church forces to one false vow after another. The good but weak Louis XII swore that his marriage with the daughter of Louis XI had never been consummated, although the couple had lived together for eighteen years. Henry VIII of England had to tell a lie to the nuntii of Pope Clement VII; Henry IV and his wife Marguerite were forced to lie when they wanted to separate.

In the section dealing with criminal evidence, Voltaire demonstrates by historical examples how untrustworthy the witnesses usually are. He cites the case of a nobleman, Langlade, who was sentenced for theft to torture and the galleys, and died as a result of his punishments; the witnesses were two servants who believed they had noticed how both he

and his wife trembled at the sight of Count de Montgommeri, before the latter had any idea that he had been robbed. It was not until much later that he complained of the theft. Langlade's innocence became apparent, when it was too late.

Voltaire mentions Madame de Chauvelin, who was accused of having murdered her husband, La Pivardière, in her château. Two maids had witnessed the murder. His own daughter, even, had heard the call of the dying man: "My God, have pity with me!" Several other witnesses had seen the blood-stained linen on the lord of the house, and then the murdered man returned unharmed from a journey.

The work concludes with a tribute to Louis XVI who made the military laws more moderate and abolished the death penalty for deserters, and it concludes with the hope that civil jurisdiction will now follow the example of the military in becoming just at the moment when Voltaire says, peace is reigning over all the earth. Only in North America are there disputes. On July 4, 1776, the revolt of the English colonies began which later led to the formation of the United States of America.

In a presentiment that this almost universal peace was not destined to last long, Voltaire concludes his work:

"Let us make use of these moments! They may be only short."

XIV

DEPARTURE FROM FERNEY

1

VOLTAIRE's last years in Ferney paved the way for the French Revolution, although he did not wish a revolution.

Even in the field of theology he did not go to extremes. For example, he opposed the *"Système de la nature,"* which he resented as an attack upon the idea of God. For himself, he could not dispense with the deistic concept, and he insisted that society could not dispense with it either, for he considered it the only check upon the murderous instincts of society. Hence the famous line from his poem *Epître à trois imposteurs:*

Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer

In the memoirs of Mallet du Pan we have the story of a visit of d'Alembert and Condorcet to Ferney. The conversation at table turned to a free discussion of religious matters. In the middle of the dinner, Voltaire sent the waiters from the room, and then said to his two friends and disciples: "Now, gentlemen, you may continue with your objections to God; but as I prefer not to be murdered and plundered by my servants, I would rather they didn't hear what you have to say."

And from the purely scientific point of view he felt repelled by the insolent pretense of some of the later leaders of the Revolution, that they could explain everything in science without a God. It is instructive to see Voltaire and Marat in conflict, and to study the impression the latter made upon him. If one later member of the Convention (Condorcet) was a man after his own heart, another later member of the same body (Marat) was nothing but contemptible in Voltaire's eyes.

In the year 1777 appeared a book, entitled: J. P. Marat: *De l'homme ou des principes et des lois de l'influence de l'âme sur le corps, et du corps sur l'âme,* Voltaire discussed it in his *Journal de politique et de littérature.*

Marat had offended him by stating that all writers before him, who had treated this topic, had produced nothing but pompous talk. "Look at the works of Hume, Voltaire, Bonnet, Racine or Pascal." He indicated that the discussion of such topics demanded a robust constitution, a strong temperament, well-developed and adaptable organs. Without these qualities, whatever the author wrote would be superficial. The physically weak and sensitive never succeeded in penetrating to the bottom of an idea; they became men like Pope or Voltaire, not like Newton and Rousseau.

Voltaire wrote politely, but sharply:

"The author is filled by the noble urge to give all people a definition of themselves and to teach the human race the secrets for which others have sought so long in vain. We may be permitted first of all to remark that such an enlightening genius as his, in setting out upon this mission should be a little more cautious in his treatment of those who have been through it before him. It would have been reasonable and useful to bring out new truths without belittling the truths that had been given us by Buffon, Haller, Lecat, and so many others. . . . And moreover, if the best new thought one has to offer is the theory that the seat of the soul is situated in the cortex of the brain, one should not go swaggering around with such contempt for others and such profound respect for oneself that one angers the reader whom one is trying to please."

And Voltaire concludes his article by showing how frantically anxious Marat is to please his readers: "Everywhere here one sees the Harlequin turning somersaults to please the parterre."

As Voltaire, conservative as he was in many respects, had done more than any other *philosophe* to pave the way for the revolution, it was to him that the revolutionaries paid homage first. After his

death he was generally regarded as the father of the French Revolution. But from Marat's reply when Camille Desmoulins reminded him of the way Voltaire had ridiculed him, we can see what a lasting grudge he held against his former critic.

Who knows whether Voltaire, had he lived to 1793, might not have had to put his head on the block!

2

This blending of the aristocratic and the revolutionary in him, won him popularity with the Church as well as with the army.

Even in Rome he was popular. In this age of reason there was once more a Pope who appreciated a joke and who liked Voltaire. Voltaire had taken into his house a poor, half-crippled ex-Jesuit, named Father Adam. Voltaire was fond of playing chess with the old man and had made him his distributor of alms, and had also given him a position in his church.

Father Adam, however, had very little hair on his head and he was much exposed to catching cold in the church, it being strictly forbidden in Roman churches to say the Mass in a wig. Voltaire, aware how easy it would be for Father Adam to succumb to an attack of rheumatism, did not hesitate to write to Rome, asking Cardinal Bernis to secure a special dispensation from the Pope, to allow a member of his household to wear a wig during the Mass. He wrote:

"I do not believe that Clement XIV is another Bembo (a cardinal, a famous Latinist and a keen sceptic); but since you have elected him, undoubtedly he deserves the place you have given him. Sometimes, Monseigneur, those who occupy humble positions are able to do us little favors, and thus the Pope can do one for me. It will cost His Holiness nothing, nor Your Excellency, nor me. The point is, to secure a dispensation to wear a wig."

When the dispensation did not arrive at once, Voltaire felt depressed; but the delay was merely

caused by a small mistake in the petition. After some time the message from Rome arrived, and Voltaire rejoiced over it in a humorous rhymed letter to the Cardinal:

Vous abritez sa vieille nuque.
Quand on est couvert de lauriers,
On peut donner une perruque.
Prêtez-moi quelque rime en uque
Pour orner mes vers familiers.
Nous n'avons que celle de d'eunuque.
Ce mot me conviendrait assez;
Mais ce mot est une sottise,
Et les beaux princes de l'Église
Pourraient s'en tenir offensés.

The Cardinal did not hesitate to show Voltaire's saucy letter to the Pope and Bernis' answer read thus: "His Holiness was delighted with your joke, and praised your high abilities. If you should ever become a Capuchin, the Pope will be able to like you as much as he respects you."

Voltaire was no less well-liked in the army than in the Church. At the time of the strained relations between France and Geneva, in 1767, when the French army was blockading Geneva in an effort to make it surrender, soldiers were billetted in Voltaire's house. A colonel of Conti's regiment stayed at Ferney, and three companies were quartered in the village. The soldiers were glad to make themselves useful by laying out paths and planting trees. Although Voltaire was too hard at work to show himself much among the grenadiers, he saw to it that they were satisfied. He furnished them not only with food, but also with blankets to protect them from the cold of the night.

One evening, when *Semiramis* was being played in the private theater, Conti's grenadiers took the part of guards in the performance. Voltaire ordered that they be given supper and paid whatever they would ask for their coöperation. One of them replied: "We will not accept any reward. We have seen Voltaire, and that is reward enough." Voltaire, overhearing the reply, exclaimed: "My brave grenadiers!" And he invited them to come as often as they liked to the château to have lunch, and he promised to find

profitable employment for any who wished to make himself useful.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, just as Ingres was later on prouder of his violin playing than of his painting, Voltaire was prouder of his ability as a bricklayer, farmer and gardener, than of all his philosophy. These activities were his practical philosophy.

3

Immediately upon his arrival in Ferney, he set about tilling the neglected soil. Anyone who came to him asking for work was given a job. In keeping with his theories of state economy, he regarded farming as the greatest and only inexhaustible source of a country's prosperity. Consequently he went to great expense to secure the best farming implements obtainable. He ploughed and sowed with his own hand like Tolstoi later.

Not long after his arrival he wrote to Haller: "The best thing we can do on this earth is to till it; other experiments are merely children's play beside this activity." He also speaks often of his new seed-drill, which is twice as economical of seed and to which no other can be compared.

In a letter of June 7, 1769, he describes in full detail his conception of the ideal manor and the ideal dairy, and he adds, as though he were building them himself:

"Indeed, there is nothing more beautiful than a large rustic house, in and out of which are going, by four great gateways, carts laden with all the harvest of the country-side. The heavy beams of oak which support the timberwork are placed on pedestals of granite. Long stables stretch out to the right and to the left: fifty cows and their calves are neatly stabled on one side; horses and oxen are on the other. Their food falls into their mangers from huge graineries above. The barns in which grain is threshed are in the middle. And, do you know that all the animals, lodged each in its place in this great edifice, are perfectly well aware that the fodder and oats that are

stored there are all theirs by right. To the South are the poultry yards and the sheep-folds; to the North are wine presses, storage rooms and the fruitery; to the East are the dwellings of the overseer and of twenty servants; to the West stretch out the wide fields devoted to pasturage and crops, fertilized by all these animals, the working companions of man.

"The trees in the orchard, loaded with fruit, are another source of wealth. Four or five bee-hives are set up near a little stream which waters this orchard; the bees give the owner an abundant harvest of honey and wax without his bothering himself about all the fables that have been devoted to this busy insect and without wasting his time trying to find out if this nation lives under laws of a so-called queen, who is so well fertilized by her subjects that she produces sixty to eighty thousand young.

"As far as the eye can see are rows of mulberry trees; the leaves nourish those precious worms, which are no less useful than the bees.

"One section of this vast enclosure is cut off by an impenetrable hedge of hawthorn which is pleasant to look at and to smell.

"The court yard and the poultry yards have rather high walls.

"This is what a good farm should be; there are some of this type in the border region in which I live; and I can assert without vanity that mine is a good deal like the one I have just described for you."

There was a field, which was called Monsieur de Voltaire's field, because he would allow no one else to sow or plough there until, in 1772, a seventy-eight-year-old man, he was no longer able to do it himself. As a planter he felt his way by constant experiments, in which, indeed, he was directed by the foremost authorities of the time, as for example the head gardener of the tree nurseries of France, Moreau de la Rochette. Often, of course, his experiments were failures in that severe climate. He writes to his adviser (on June 1, 1767):

"I was unable to overcome the severity of the climate. The comptroller general requested me to plant

madder; I tried, but had no success. Furthermore I planted more than 20,000 chestnut trees, which I ordered from Savoy; practically all have died. Four times I have set out nut trees along the main high way; three-fourths of them have either perished or been torn up by the peasants. However, I have not given up, and old and feeble as I am, I shall plant today, even if I have to die tomorrow. Others will profit from it."

Moreau knew from his own experience the disappointments of one who sows or plants. He helped Voltaire zealously. The poet asked him to ship him two hundred elms and one hundred mountain ash; six weeks later he ordered fifty maple trees and an equal number of plane-trees.

One thing which was very little thought about at that time, troubled Voltaire continually: the disappearance of the forests. He was shocked at the indifference of the state, which took no measures to preserve the forests, any more than it did to keep the stock of the studs of domestic animals from degenerating. The emigration of the peasants to the cities, however, strikes Moreau de la Rochette as the gravest menace, and he draws Voltaire's attention to this.

4

Voltaire was not satisfied to be a mere agriculturist, he was ardently interested in doing whatever he could to raise the standard of living for the poor of the district. His first industry had been the manufacture of watches. His second was silk weaving. We have seen that he offered the Duchess of Choiseul a pair of silk stockings which were woven on his estate and which he hoped were worthy of her wearing. The theater in Ferney, which had been turned into a storeroom for linen, became the silkworm house. On September 4, 1769, he writes to the Duchess of Choiseul the following letter:

"It is from my own silkworms that I have the material for these stockings; it is with my own hands that, with the help of the son of Calas, they were

made on my place; these are the first stockings that have ever been made in this country.

"Be so kind as to put them on, Madame, just one time; then show your legs to whomever you please; and if it is not admitted that my silk is stronger and more beautiful than that of Provence or Italy, I shall give up the manufacture."

Watch-making, of course, was the chief industry, as all the apprentices coming from Geneva were highly skilled workmen, probably the best watchmakers in the world. He built houses for them, and we have seen how he tried to create markets for them in Spain and Italy. Catherine II bought and recommended the watches of his workers. If the Empress succeeded in conquering Constantinople, he was ready and determined to supply watches to all members of the Greek Church there. As the conquest was too long in coming, he did not wait for it, but sent a load of watches to Constantinople by the aid of the French ambassador in Turkey. These watches, he says, are real works of art, all the workmanship of fine goldsmiths, and his price was one-third of what they would cost in Geneva.

He even asked d'Argental to try to get the Duke of Praslin to send consignments of watches to the Dey and his army in Algiers and to the Bey and his army in Tunis.

No wonder that these people showed their gratitude. It became a habit to call Ferney by a new name, "Ferney-Voltaire," or just "Voltaire"; Maurepas, however, refused to grant a petition to change the name officially. After Voltaire's death his name was officially suppressed and everything was done to eradicate every trace of his activity in Ferney. Not until the Revolution were the two names Voltaire and Ferney coupled together again.

But as long as he lived the inhabitants felt strongly what a protector they had in him. One day he appeared in person at a meeting of the landowners in order to accomplish something definite in his fight for the county of Gex. The result was that it was unanimously voted to favor the efforts that were being made to lighten the tax burden on the popula-

tion. When he left the hall the populace shouted: "*Vive le roi! Vive Voltaire!*" The horses before his coach were decorated with flowers and the coach itself was filled with laurel and flowers. In formal procession the people followed him on horseback and on foot to Ferney. In all the villages through which he passed, the same enthusiasm, the same conferring of laurel wreaths.

5

Among the inhabitants of that region was a poor aristocratic family by the name of Crassy, to whom Voltaire had some time before lent 15,000 livres to recover their property, of which the Jesuits in Ornex had taken possession. Since then the Crassy family had been a constant guest at Ferney.

In 1775 they introduced to Voltaire another poor aristocratic family by the name of Varicourt. One of them was a young handsome priest, whose career Voltaire assured through Madame de Saint-Julien, so that later, in the nineteenth century, he became Bishop of Orléans. He had a young sister, Reine Philiberte de Varicourt, who because of her poverty was planning to enter a nunnery, as it was incredible that anyone would marry her without a dowry, pretty and attractive as the eighteen-year-old girl was.

Voltaire who long before had found a good, suitable husband for Mademoiselle Corneille, and another for her sister-in-law, Mademoiselle Dupuits, would not hear of the charming young girl's becoming a nun. With the permission of her family he adopted her as his daughter, and in his house she was known only as *Belle et Bonne,* the pretty and good. Later, during his visit to Paris, and still later when during the Revolution homage was done to his sarcophagus, *Belle et Bonne* was regarded almost as a daughter who represented him. At the formal ceremony in honor of Voltaire, she was, also, in the procession and carried a basket holding two white pigeons with pink bills. This sight was so lovely that everybody was moved, and Voltaire was upset when somebody slaughtered the two pigeons.

With her beauty, her charm, her dainty bearing and the joyful exuberance of her youth, Reine de Varicourt became the pride of the house in Ferney. It was a lovely sight to see with what heartiness Voltaire kissed her hand. He found a marriage for her in November, 1777.

The bridegroom was the young Marquis de Villette, who, like many others, falsely flattered himself that he was an illegitimate son of Voltaire, simply because the latter had known his somewhat frivolous mother. He was a young man whom Voltaire turned from a life of many vices and excesses. He fell madly in love with Reine de Varicourt, and wished no dowry as he himself had a yearly income of one hundred and fifty thousand francs. He became a good husband for Voltaire's adopted daughter and remained a sincere and devoted, even though a little loud, admirer of the patriarch.

Voltaire seems to have had a variety of interests to compensate him for his stay in the lonely mountain valley.

He was, however, not reconciled to his exile. On the contrary, with the passing of years, when he became a very aged man, his impatience to see France and Paris, increased so that the idea never left his mind.

6

On January 2, 1778, *Irène,* Voltaire's tragedy written at the age of eighty-four, was accepted unanimously by the actors of the Comédie Française. La Harpe, for whom Voltaire had shown the same consideration as if he had been his own son, withdrew his own previously accepted play, *Les Barmécides,* in spite of the master's protest, not to delay the performance of Irène.

Nicolas Barthe did the same thing.

Barthe's letter to the actors reads:

"Gentlemen: A new play by Monsieur de Voltaire has been read to you; you were on the point of considering *L'Homme personnel.* Now there is only one thing for you to do, not to think of my play any

longer. I am aware that new plays are performed in the order in which they are accepted, and that this is the prescribed procedure. But what writer would dare to call upon the rule in a case like this! Monsieur de Voltaire stands above the law like a king. If I am not to have the honor of making my contribution to the pleasure of the public, the least I can do is not to stand in the way of the public delight that will surely be occasioned by a new drama from the pen that created *Zaïre and Merope.* I hope you will stage this play as soon as possible. And may its author, like Sophocles, continue to write tragedies until he is a hundred years old, and may he die as you, Messieurs, live—flooded with applause."

His desire to see this fickle Paris once more did not diminish. He had to abandon the hope that he would be called back, but he said to himself: "What have I to fear?" He had not been expelled. There was no express prohibition that excluded him from Paris.

His impatience was fed by his niece, the dull Madame Denis, who had enough of Ferney and was longing for the capital. Voltaire's friends in Paris, d'Argental and Thibouville, did everything in their power to pave the way for him, while the Marquis de Villette and his pretty young wife daily tried to persuade Voltaire that the whole effect of his tragedy would be lost if he were not present in person for its opening.

Finally the trip was decided upon. Madame Denis and the Marquis and his wife traveled ahead. They were all to be the guests of Belle-et-Bonne. It was a difficult parting for Voltaire's colony. Grief and terror could be discerned in the faces of the populace. They had a presentiment that they would probably never see him again and that all their prosperity and happiness would leave with him. Those who had come to wish him a pleasant journey could scarcely speak for their tears. There were tears in his own eyes.

On February 5, 1778, before he entered his coach, with his secretary and his cook, he promised soothingly that he would be back inside of six weeks. He was so sincere in this belief that he did not put his

manuscripts and papers in order before his departure. In spite of his age and sickliness, he still felt strength. He was little given to thinking about his death, still less about his immortality.

Death and immortality were two things of which he was sure enough.

XV

TRIUMPH AND DEATH

1

From Ferney they went to Nantua, where they had made preparations for spending the first night. When they halted at Bourg-en-Bresse to change the horses, Voltaire was recognized and the entire city gathered around his coach. The post-master, noticing that the post-boy, from force of habit, had hitched a bad horse to the coach, had another excellent horse brought out, and said with a vivid oath: "Go ahead, and if you drive my horses to pieces, I do not care, you are driving Monsieur de Voltaire, don't forget that!" The people laughed and applauded. Voltaire also had to laugh although the incognito which he had aimed to keep during the journey was betrayed.

Passing Sanecy, on the third day they reached Dijon where Voltaire had business to transact for his niece. He stopped at the Hôtel de la Croix d'Or.

The prominent men of the city came to call upon him. Curious people bribed the maids of the hotel to leave the door of his room open, so that they could have a look at him. Young people disguised themselves as waiters at the hotel in order to serve at his table and have the pleasure of seeing him. In the evening, there was a serenade under his window.

The next night he was in Joigny, and arrived the next day in Paris. But a mile outside of Moret, the coach axle broke and a post-boy was sent ahead in a hurry. The Marquis de Villette rode out in his coach and took the patriarch into his own coach. Voltaire wished no longer to ride as fast as before. He ordered his secretary to tell the postillions that they were driving a poor man who was supposed to be operated on in Paris.

On February 10 they arrived. At the outskirts of the city, the officials asked whether there was any-

thing in the coach that was in contradiction to the orders of the King. "Gentlemen," answered Voltaire, "I do not believe that there is any other contraband than myself." One of the guards said to his comrades: "God help me, this is Monsieur de Voltaire." He tugged at the coat of the one who was attending to the coach and repeated the same thing, so that Wagnière began to laugh. Then all, with admiration and respect, looked at the people in the coach and asked Monsieur de Voltaire to continue his journey.

During the last days, the long-exiled man had been as though electrified at the thought that he would see Paris again, after almost a generation. At every stop he wanted to get the good Wagnière drunk, "so he would once in his life learn how it felt." He sat in the coach and read or thought, or told a hundred comic stories.

2

The coach stopped before the house of the Marquis de Villette, the pretty building in the Rue de Beaune where Voltaire had lived in his youth with Thiriot, in the apartment of Madame de Bernières. But immediately upon his arrival he set out to call upon his old friend, his dear angel, d'Argental. The latter was not at home. Voltaire, however, scarcely had returned to Villette's when the friend of his youth arrived. The two men who had been united by such a hearty friendship, but who had been separated by circumstances for so long a time, saw each other again at the age of eighty years.

A crowd of friends started to flood the room, and from that moment the stream never ceased. He who, in Ferney, had been used to living as he pleased, who made himself inaccessible to all visitors and simply let them go away without having accomplished anything except being asked to dine with Madame Denis, now denied himself to nobody, and was so careless as to receive this crowd of curious people and to have a friendly and courteous word for everyone. Especially the many whom his good mem-

ory enable him to recognize after almost thirty years, went away delighted.

But immediately the unpleasant visitors, too, began to arrive. The Court and the Church were announced.

First the Marquis de Jaucourt arrived, to inform Madame Denis that Versailles was astonished at the arrival of her uncle. The ill-humor occasioned by this was great. But M. Jules de Pelignac, an intimate friend of the Queen, succeeded in smoothing the angry waves.

Next came the priests, one after another, to convert the sinner and to administer the sacrament to him, who was soon going to die. The priest of Saint-Sulpice visited him several times in vain; and an ex-Jesuit called Abbé Gaultier wrote a friendly letter, was admitted, and bored Voltaire. Several days later, disguised in worldly clothes, came the Abbé Marthe. As soon as he was alone with Voltaire, he said: "Confess at once to me! No hesitation! Hurry up!" And he kneeled near his bed. He was only removed when Wagnière came in.

Tronchin, Voltaire's former physician in Geneva, who had lived now for ten years in Paris, at once sent him a bitter letter in which he reproached him for his silence. As a physician, he was very displeased that Voltaire, at his great age, should have exposed himself to the extraordinary fatigues which would be the inevitable result of his stay in Paris after so long an absence. Voltaire's presence in the capital was taken as such an event that everything else, politics, rumors of war, intrigues of the Parliament, gossip at Court, the fight between the followers of Gluck and Piccini, was forgotten.

3

The day after his arrival the Academy sent a deputation to greet him. It consisted of three members, the Prince of Beauveau, the Marquis of Saint-Lambert and Jean François Marmontel. They started at once to talk of a public session of the Academy in his honor, a thing which had never happened before.

On February 14 a deputation from the Theatre arrived, headed by a handsome actor named Bellecour and the famous Madame Vestris. Bellecour delivered a speech. Voltaire answered the actor: "From now on I can live only for you and with you."

La Harpe, who was one of the first to arrive at the house of the man whom he then regarded as his intellectual father, wrote about him: "I had not seen him for ten years and I found him neither changed nor aged. He read us the fifth act of his tragedy; he is still full of life, his wit has neither decreased nor has his memory weakened."

Then the usually very haughty Gluck arrived and introduced himself. Two hours after Gluck, Piccini arrived to make his call. Madame Necker, the wife of the Minister, who had originated the idea of having a statue of Voltaire made by Pigalle, was one of his most heartily received visitors. She was not especially pleased that her darling Varicourt had married Villette, who was known to have an unsavory reputation, and she was one of those who did not like to see Voltaire staying in the home of Villette. But she forgot her indignation when she saw Belle-et-Bonne.

Dr. Franklin came with his nephew whom he led at his hand. Voltaire answered in English when America's great citizen paid his homage. Madame Denis complained that she and the others present could not understand what was said. "I could not refrain from indulging myself in the vain satisfaction of speaking the same language as Dr. Franklin." The two men embraced, deeply moved.

Voltaire had given the actors his promise to attend the performance of Corneille's *Héraclius;* he had, however, rather hoped to see *Cinna.* They politely met his wishes and changed the performance. But when the day arrived, Voltaire had such bad pains in his lower abdomen that Tronchin prescribed absolute rest.

His opinion was that Voltaire should, for some time, receive nobody; but the hosts of visitors who tried in vain to see him at the theater or in other public places caused the prescription of the physician to be disregarded.

As Tronchin wrote in vain: "Voltaire is living now on his principal rather than his interest, and his strength would soon be exhausted by such a way of living." This note of Tronchin to the Marquis de Villette was published in the *Journal de Paris* of February 19, apparently with the intention of requesting the public of Paris to give the hero of the day a rest; but after February 19, Voltaire has resumed his regular mode of life in Paris; the pains had disappeared; he felt physically and mentally fit and took no care of himself.

His first thought was the performance of *Irène* and the distribution of the rôles. The Marshal of Richelieu visited him and discussed this difficult question. The two friends of youth were now marked by their age. An anonymous journalist of that time wrote: "It was a strange spectacle to observe these two old men. They are approximately of the same age, the Duke a little younger; but despite his distinguished appearance and his choice clothes, he seemed more worn out than Monsieur de Voltaire in night cap and dressing-gown." The Marshal who was interested in an actress, Madame Molé, asked Voltaire to let her take the part of Zoe, the confident of Irène. Voltaire writes jestingly: "He assured me that Madame Molé would not necessarily be unbearable in that rôle," and he promised Richelieu to give the young lady that part. When he meanwhile heard that Mademoiselle Sainval would be better suited for the part, he wrote several skillful and flattering letters to Richelieu and to Monsieur and Madame Molé, telling them that he had found it necessary to change his decision.

4

Finally, public opinion incarnate came to greet Voltaire—in the shape of the more than eighty-year-old Madame du Deffand. The old Marquise was as blind as Justice and as witty as Malice. Voltaire had been corresponding with her since 1732. He had known her at the time of the Regency, when she was a Court beauty and the Regent, among many others, was her lover. He had followed her career during

the forty years of her relations with President Hénault. He knew the astonishing and moving passion with which the then eighty-year-old blind lady was seized for Horace Walpole, whom she never saw, but in whom she encountered the English type which was entirely new to her. Voltaire knew perfectly well that she lavished all the tenderness of which she was capable upon this friend, and that she, whose temper was satirical and whose affections were as cool as her senses were cold, was always writing something nasty about his philosophical friends to Walpole, who with the passing years grew to hate them more and more. She shared the opinions of the *philosophes* but insinuated herself into Walpole's good graces by showing contempt for them.

D'Alembert had informed Voltaire (through Mademoiselle de Lespinasse) what a faithless friend the Marquise was to him; with what pleasure she circulated everything malicious that Fréron wrote against him, while at the same time she was sending him the most friendly letters, even pretending to treat him as a confidant; she complained bitterly to him, for instance, that the ungrateful President Hénault had not left her anything in his will.

He had written nine weeks ago to Madame du Deffand in regard to Catherine II:

"Her son loves her; her people love her; her Court worships her; she sent me a portrait of her pretty face framed by twenty big diamonds, also the prettiest furs of the north, and a law book which is as admirable as our French jurisprudence is shocking. Allow me, therefore, my honest devotion for a state which has 2000 miles in circumference and where I am liked, whereas I am not exactly too well treated in the little part of Western Europe in which by the will of fate I was born."

Nearly a generation before, in a letter of August 14, 1749, Voltaire had written to Hénault: "Madame du Deffand, how highly I esteem her. It is my intention to pay court to her when I get to Paris." Now he was there, and it was she who called upon him. It is very interesting to follow up in her letters to Walpole the first impression Voltaire made at this time

upon this woman who was the center of the high society of Paris. Voltaire had scarcely arrived when he sent her this note: "I arrive here dead tired, and want to arise from the dead only that I may hurl myself upon my knees before the Marquise du Deffand."

On February 12, 1778, she writes: "Yesterday Voltaire received three hundred persons. I shall be very cautious about getting into this crowd. All Parnassus was there, from the bottom to the top. He will not be able to stand the strain; he may die before I get a chance to see him." A little later in February she writes:

"All the actors are going to his house to rehearse for *Irène* these days. He invited me, but between eleven and twelve, when I am frequently just beginning to get up; it is therefore doubtful if I can go there. He showed me the greatest friendship and great joy when he saw me. This joy was mutual. Yesterday, it was said he could digest nothing. His indescribable vivacity is wearing him out. I should not be surprised if he were to die soon."

On February 22 the Marquise again writes to Walpole about Voltaire. She had been to his house again; she wants to prove that she cared very little about visiting him.

"I have told you about my first visit to Voltaire. That took place on the 14th. He had arrived on the tenth, and of all his acquaintances I was the one who was in the least hurry to visit him. I wanted to get him alone, that is, with the Prince of Beauveau. Yesterday I made my second visit, again with Monsieur de Beauveau but this was not as pleasant as the first. First we went through several rooms in which the windows stood open. We were received by the niece Denis (the best woman in the world but exceedingly shallow), by Monsieur de Villette and by his young wife who is said to be pleasant. She is called 'La Belle et Bonne' by Voltaire and his followers. When we entered the living room, we did not find Voltaire there; he had locked himself into a room with his secretary. The Prince, who was in a hurry, said good-bye, and I remained with the niece, the Mar-

quis Massarille and Belle-et-Bonne. They told me that Voltaire was half dead from exertion; in the afternoon he had read his whole play to the actors. I wanted to go away; but I was asked to stay, and Voltaire, in order to make me wait quietly, sent me several verses written to Pigalle, who is to make a statue of him. After I had waited for a good quarter of an hour, Voltaire came and said that he was so dead tired he could not open his mouth. I wanted to leave him alone, he held me back; he spoke to me about his play, invited me again to come to the main rehearsal which was to be held at his house. He wanted to tell me all about the most minute details. That is all he thinks about; that is why he came to Paris; it will send him to his grave if it does not become a great success. But everybody has sworn to make it that."

Then she informs Walpole of what Voltaire has told her about all the priests who bothered him.

5

On February 25, Voltaire lay in his bed as usual, dictating a letter to his secretary, when he had to cough very violently. "I have a hemorrhage," he exclaimed and the blood gushed from his mouth and nose.

Voltaire's first thought was not to send for Tronchin but for the Abbé Gaultier, as he was continually afraid that his body would be refused burial. Wagnière, who did not like to let the priest enter, pretended to go, and assured him that he had not found the Abbé at home. Voltaire said to those present: "Gentlemen, you at least are witnesses that I have wished to do what is called the duty of a dying man." Tronchin came and ordered that strange but customary panacea of blood-letting. After about three cups of blood had been taken from him, the hemorrhage decreased; but in decreasing violence it kept up for twenty-two days. A young nurse was employed who, despite the weakness of Villette, kept all the curious and meddling people from Voltaire.

On March 2 the Abbé called again and was received. Voltaire asked him to hear a confession "before his death." According to the statement of Wagnière, he said bluntly, "Several days ago I asked you to come about this matter as you know. If you are content, we will regulate this little matter now." The Abbé answered that he would gladly hear Voltaire's confession, but that first a refutation of the contents of his writings was absolutely necessary. Voltaire said that he would do everything necessary, sent everyone away and remained alone with the Abbé.

Three days before, at the request of Wagnière that he give him some means of refuting the charges by which Voltaire's enemies would dishonor his memory, he had asked for a piece of paper, and he wrote the following lines:

"I am dying in the worship of God, loving my friends, without hatred of my enemies and with contempt of superstition.

February 28, 1778 Voltaire."

He asked the Abbé to have the "recantation"—which was none, but only the creed of a deist—published in the newspapers of Paris. The Abbé replied that there was no hurry, he had to find out first if his superiors were satisfied with this "recantation."

He took it to the Archbishop of Paris, who declared it as not sufficient. Thereafter, he went with it to his next superior, the parish priest of Saint-Sulpice, whom he at the same time gave 600 livres for the poor of the parish, and this man gave him the same unfavorable answer.

Therefore, the Abbé came again to get a confession which would better satisfy the ecclesiastical demands. Voltaire wrote now according to tradition "to secure peace," the following statement:

"The undersigned states that for the last four months he has suffered from hemorrhages and that at his age of eighty-four years he was unable to drag himself to a church. As the parish priest of Saint-Sulpice has added to his other good deeds the kindness of sending the Abbé Gaultier to me, I have confessed to him and I am now dying in the Catholic faith in which I was born, and I hope that God in his

mercy will consider me worthy of forgiving me all my faults and if I have ever offended the Church, I ask God and It forgiveness.
March 2, 1778, in the house of Marquis de Villette.
Voltaire."

Now the Abbé was to give Voltaire the sacrament, but the latter declined, answering: "Monsieur Abbé, remember that I am having one hemorrhage after another, and have to be very careful not to mix the blood of God with mine."

The parish priest of Saint-Sulpice received the Abbé Gaultier very ungraciously, when the latter returned with signed statement which gave as little security of orthodoxy as the first. When the Abbé returned to the Rue de Beaune, he was told that Monsieur de Voltaire was unable to receive him.

On the same day on which Voltaire had confessed, La Harpe came to him in the name of the French Academy to inquire of his health, and informed him of the resolution of the Academy to send at every session a messenger to ask about his health as long as he was ill. "I have," Voltaire answered, "thought that I could not show myself grateful for the courteousness of the Academy in a better way than fulfilling my religious obligations, in order to win the right to a Christian burial in consecrated soil and a Mass of the Franciscan friars." For it was the custom of the Academy to have a Mass read in the monastery of the Franciscans for every member it lost.

When Voltaire's Paris physician, Lorry, smiled satirically at his confession, the patient answered: "I do not want to be thrown into the carrion pit. These priests annoy me and bore me, but they have me in their hands! I am forced to free myself from this difficulty. As soon as I can I shall depart. The fanatic zeal of these priests cannot follow me to Ferney. Had I stayed there this would not have happened." Of course, Voltaire's confession was interpreted as a denial of all of his life's work. The zealous Horace Walpole made this his point in a letter to Madame du Deffand. But she was reasonable enough to answer him: "You judge his motives for this attitude wrongly; he would be offended if it were thought

that he had changed his way of thinking; everything that he has done is out of consideration for decorum 'pour le décorum' and in order to be left alone." Walpole as an Englishman found it difficult to imagine himself among the conditions and ceremonies of France, that would necessitate such a thing. If, for instance, a French Protestant did not want his wife to be regarded a concubine and his children illegitimate, he was forced to submit to the Catholic ritual. In France there was only one form of religion, which was represented by the very powerful priests. It took hold upon the individual when he was born and did not let go before his last breath.

6

To the general surprise the patient convalesced. His strong constitution even at his advanced age overcame a serious illness. On March 2, Madame du Deffand wrote to Walpole: "Yesterday I heard through d'Argental, who goes twice a day to look after Voltaire, that Tronchin believes him cured. He has no fever, he is not weak; though he still has hemorrhages; it is the general conviction that he recover. I shall, perhaps, visit him today."

As soon as Voltaire felt well again, he could not help turning his attention to Versailles. He was *gentilhomme ordinaire du Roi* and only the helpless condition in which he had been could excuse him for not having yet asked an audience with the King and the Queen.

He knew nothing of what an unbreakable circle the Clergy had closed around Louis XVI, and that the priests would describe it as a triumph of godlessness if the King should receive the author of the *Dictionnaire Philosophique.*

But as it seemed as if there were no limits to the enthusiasm with which Paris paid homage to Voltaire, or to the honors that were conferred upon him every day, several of the people at Court took the liberty of hinting to the Queen that it was not wise to show a marked difference between the sentiment of

the Court and that of the population. It had been proposed to give Voltaire a seat at the Théâtre Français, to pay him the same honor that Corneille and Racine had enjoyed. Marie Antoinette preferred to let him have a loge in the same section as her own, so that she could speak with him every evening. But when the King heard that the Queen mentioned Voltaire, he said: "True, Madame, Voltaire is in Paris; but it is not with my permission!"—"But, Sire," she answered, "he has never been exiled."—"That may be; but I know what I am talking about!"

It was pointed out to Marie Antoinette that if Voltaire was not received in regular audience, the Queen might still see him in the large reception room at the palace. She thought of asking his advice and also thought of what else she should talk about with him. She was advised to talk exclusively about his poetic works. But she wanted first to assure herself of the consent of the King and the next day she answered that it was final that Voltaire should not come in contact with any member of the Royal Family. The King showed his indulgence by not taking any notice of his presence in Paris.

Although Tronchin predicted an inevitable relapse if Voltaire should resume his normal mode of life, he started in at once to rewrite his tragedy, dictated numerous letters and received curious visitors by the hundreds, among them all who were able to hold a pen.

Many prepared at home the polite phrases with which to address him. A translator of Ovid by the name of Farian de Saint-Ange said to Voltaire: "Today I have come prepared only to greet Homer; another time I shall greet Sophocles and Euripides, then Tacitus, then Lucian."—"My dear man," the sarcastic poet answered, "I am, as you see, a rather old man; could you not make those visits all in one?"—

Among those who appeared there was a female impersonator, if she were not a woman, the Chevalier d'Eon, a mysterious adventurer who generally passed as a man but who had appeared in woman's attire at the Court of Queen Elizabeth whose reader

she had been. When she was announced, the servants and those present gathered so suddenly to see her that she felt embarrassed and hid her face in her muff; she confined herself to exchanging a few polite words with the man with whom she had wished to get acquainted.

7

When on March 10, a rehearsal of *Irène* was held in the hall of the Marquis de Villette, Voltaire was too weak to attend it. During the night he had been coughing and Tronchin had ordered him to rest absolutely; now the physician was relentless when it came to giving him permission to attend the first performance of his tragedy, although neither the actors nor the Parisians could imagine this performance without him. Against all expectations, he himself seemed to have very little desire to see it; the actors had disappointed him; he found them mediocre and unintelligent; they never wanted to take his advice.

Madame Vestris, who was to play the main part, despite her fine talents, lacked *"le diable au corps,"* which for Voltaire was the fundamental requirement for the art of acting.

For several days he felt crushed; he seemed to have aged years. He no longer wished to listen to anybody except about his play; he seemed stupefied. As nothing seemed to make any impression on him, he was shown a number of satires which had been written against *Irène;* but he, who had always been so easily upset, returned them to Villette without saying a word.

In the meantime, the papers were full of verses and poems of all sorts in his honor.

Voltaire's many opponents, of course, did not remain idle during this shower of bouquets. They sent epigrams and satires of all kinds to his house. He said: "In Ferney I was sent such piggishnesses every week and I had to pay postage for them; here, it costs me nothing."

Voltaire's health improved somewhat, but he still had hemorrhages and was very depressed.

Never had a performance at the Théâtre Français been awaited as anxiously as the première of *Irène.* The crowd was so immense that the hall was filled in a moment. The Queen with her Court, and the Count and the Countess de Bourbon, the Count d'Artois, all of Versailles with the exception of the King, were present. Marie Antoinette sat with a pencil in her hand and wrote down the verses she liked best; probably the verses which were of a solemn and religious character, to give them to her husband so that he should have a better opinion of the poet of the play. But that evening those verses which contained attacks on the clergy earned the greatest applause.

When toward the end of the play success was sure beyond a doubt, Voltaire was quickly informed. He answered: "This is one consolation for me, but it does not make me well."

The next day he was again less well.

At the second performance of *Irène,* the spectators asked the actors on the stage how the poet of the tragedy was. Monvel answered: "Monsieur de Voltaire's health is not as we would like it to be, for the joy of the public and to our own interest." The next day, however, the *Journal de Paris* reported that the illness of the poet would have no after-effects, and as a matter of fact he did soon recover.

With the same gaiety as before he again opened his house to everyone who wanted to see him. The Academy at once sent a deputation which congratulated him on the success of *Irène,* and in gratitude he dedicated his play to the Academy.

8

Voltaire seemed to have become well, even young again. He was ambitious, impatient, active, went out on foot and rode in his coach to call upon his friends. When his horses went slowly through the Place Louis XV, now the Place de la Concorde, which he had never seen, he was recognized and a crowd of curious people and admirers surrounded his coach and escorted him to his home.

On returning there he was greeted by a deputation of the Freemason's lodge "Nine Sisters," which consisted of forty masons with their officers at their head. They informed him that on March 10 his health had been drunk at the lodge and songs had been sung in his honor. Even though he was not a Mason, he belonged to the lodge because of his love of the human race and because of his hatred of cruelty and fanaticism. The lodge consisted chiefly of writers and artists, and Voltaire said a courteous word to everyone. With his keen memory he remembered the circumstances under which each one had become known to him.

Voltaire had become the center of Paris. In the Place Louis Quinze Wagnière heard a poor mountebank who was doing card tricks, say to those who stood around him: "These card tricks, ladies and gentlemen, I learned in Ferney from the great man who is now turning Paris upside down, Monsieur de Voltaire, *notre maître à tous.*"

On March 30 the patient was finally well enough to ride to the theater and see his play. But first he wanted to call upon the French Academy.

His coach made the greatest efforts to force its way through the populace who had quickly gathered and filled the air with their chorus of homage. The crowd was so vast that a young man, the Count of Montlosier, was raised by it and thrown against Voltaire's shoulder so that he became dusty from the powder of Voltaire's wig before he fell down again.

In the meantime two thousand people had come to the Louvre. They applauded and called "Vive Monsieur de Voltaire!" The Academy for the first and only time disregarded their custom and went to meet him in the entrance hall, which had never been done before, even when one of the Princes of the Blood came to visit. Only the clerical members, with one exception, remained at home. Voltaire was asked to take the chair of the director, and was unanimously elected honorary director for the next year.

In this session d'Alembert delivered his *Eulogy of Despréaux* which was a great success. He interwove a hint about the great colleague the Academy saw

in their midst after twenty-eight years. After comparing the style of Boileau with that of Racine, he characterized the three masters, Despréaux, Racine and Voltaire: "I am naming the last although he still is alive; for why should we renounce the joy of putting a great man in the place which posterity will accord him whether we do or not?"

After the session again the coach had to make great efforts to get through the curious crowd which in the meantime had increased immensely. People of every profession and degree, people old and young, common men and noblemen, savoyards, vegetable hucksters, little children—all these in a great chorus cried, clamored, called: *"Vive Voltaire!"* while they applauded like crazy people and pressed about the coach all the way to the theater.

The coach had scarcely come to a stop when everybody tried to climb up on its wheels to see the great man close at hand.

Wagnière says that a gentleman jumped on the running board of the coach and asked Voltaire for permission to kiss his hand. When he got Madame de Villette's hand instead, he exclaimed naively: "Truly, this is a very fresh and full hand for a man of eighty-four years."—The ladies were assiduous in their attentions; at every step Voltaire made, they applauded him and stopped him to observe him better. For keepsakes, they tore little pieces from the sable fur which Catherine had given him.

9

When he showed himself in the theater, loud calls were heard and the entire orchestra stamped applause. His seat was in the loge which was reserved for the chamberlains of the King. There, Madame Denis and the Marquise de Villette had already taken their seats. He wanted to sit behind them, but the calls of the audience forced him to take his seat between them.

"The wreath!" exclaimed everyone, and at the same moment the actor Brizard entered the loge and

put a laurel wreath on Voltaire's head. With a modest gesture he took it off and put it on the head of the young Marquise, his pretty and good foster-daughter. But the public demanded loudly that he himself should wear it, which resulted in Prince Beauveau putting it on the head for which it was intended.

Grimm, an eye-witness, writes:

"All the ladies had risen. All the actors stood at the edge of the stage before the curtain went up, and looked at Voltaire. The people crowded at the entrance to the parterre, where several ladies had descended as they otherwise could find no more seats from which they could get a glimpse of the object of the general adoration. The entire hall was obscured by the dust that rose from the crowd which surged up and down. This enthusiasm, this general delirium, lasted more than twenty minutes; it was not without great efforts that the actors were finally able to start the performance."

Irène was being played for the sixth time. But, except for Voltaire, no one had come to see the tragedy. Nobody listened, and when the curtain went down after the last act, the rage of applauding and stamping began anew, and Voltaire was forced to address a few words to the roaring, trembling crowd. The storm seemed to have no end, when after some time the curtain rose again.

The actors had been forgotten in the general enthusiasm, and besides they were filled with gratitude to the man, who for half a century, had been the mainstay of their theater; they had hastily thought up something they could do to show that they shared the passion that was raging in the hall. Mademoiselle La Chassaigne had the idea that Voltaire's bust should be wreathed.

Only a short time ago it had been put up in the foyer of the theater; it and its pedestal were brought and put in the middle of the stage. What followed now was improvised, but it could have made no stronger effect had it been planned weeks in advance. All the actors and actresses stood in a semicircle around the bust, with palm leaves and flower garlands in their hands. In the background the guards

had taken their place, they had played as Imperial guards in *Irène*.

On seeing this bust, these garlands and poems, a storm of applause, a hurricane of cheers broke out. No one felt in the mood for a satirical smile or word; had such a word been said, the one who uttered it would have exposed himself to the danger of being torn to pieces. Jealousy and hatred, anger and embitterment, everything that had made Voltaire's life difficult for several generations, had been swept away.

In the monk's costume of Leonce, Brizard stepped forth and put the first wreath on the head of the bust, while the guards gave a ruffle of drums and a flourish of trumpets. Then wreaths were put on the bayonets of the guards, who held them so that they formed a sort of triumphal arch.

The excited voices of all actors and spectators now harmonized into a single voice, calling the name which stood to them for hundreds of masterpieces. Voltaire had hid in the background of his loge, but the Marquis de Villette brought him forth. He bowed so deeply that his forehead touched the edge of the loge, and when he stood up again his eyes were filled with tears. On the stage Madame Vestris stepped forth and recited the following verses improvised by the Marquis of Saint-Marc:

Aux yeux de Paris enchanté
Reçois en ce jour un hommage
Que confirmera d'âge en âge
La sévère postérité.
Non, tu n'as pas besoin d'atteindre au noir rivage
Pour jouir de l'honneur de l'immortalité.
Voltaire, reçois la couronne
Que l'on vient de te présenter;
Il est beau de la mériter,
Quand c'est la France qui la donne.

After *Irène*, Voltaire's comedy *Nanine* was played with the same enthusiasm for the poet and the same indifference for the play, which received as much applause as the tragedy. When the curtain fell, Voltaire rose from his seat. In the corridor and on the stairs all the ladies had taken their stands, so that he went between two rows of flushed faces which

smiled through tears, almost as if he were being passed from hand to hand, out to his coach.

They would not let him go, they took hold of the horses and, unbelievable as it seems, they too were kissed. The crowd called for torches, so that all could see him. When the coach began to move the enthusiastic people stood on the steps to kiss his hands once more. Again the crowd which called, "*Vive Voltaire*" was as immense as on his arrival so that the coachman had to let his horses go slowly all the way.

10

When Voltaire arrived at home he was much moved, but he said to his secretary: "My friend, you do not know the French: they were just as eager to see the Swiss Jean Jacques Rousseau. The people paid a franc to a ragman for permission to stand on his shoulders to see Rousseau. The next day a warrant was issued for his arrest, and he had to flee."

In the theater the Royal Family had been conspicuous by its absence. Marie Antoinette, who had been to the opera with the Count of Artois, later Charles X, intended to drop in, incognito, for a few minutes at the Théâtre Français. One and a half years before the Count de Provence, later Louis XVIII, had asked Voltaire for a brief musical play for a feast which he was planning to give for the Queen in Brunoi; Voltaire had been gracious enough to write for that occasion the fine *ballet divertissement* entitled *L'Hôte et l'Hôstesse.* But while the Queen was going from the opera to the theater, she received a note from the King forbidding her to do so.

Had there been real plan in the behavior of the Court, this policy of ignoring Voltaire would have been carried out. But there was no real will in this doomed regime. On April 1, for instance, *Irène* was performed in the Court of Versailles and not even enough tact was shown to invite the poet to see his own play. This gave Voltaire the wish to return to Ferney as quickly as possible, an idea which Tron-

chin seconded. "You have," he said, "too good a head on your shoulders not to realize that a tree of eighty-four years cannot be transplanted if one does not wish it to die." Dupuits, the husband of Marie Corneille, strongly supported Tronchin's idea of an early departure.

But these urgent requests made no impression upon Voltaire until he had a relapse. Madame Denis was bored to death in the lonely valley of the Jura mountains, and here was filled with happiness to be a person of public interest, a center of Paris. The Marquis de Villette, whose house and person were given a new splendor by Voltaire's presence, wished him to stay as did d'Alembert, Thibouville and the other *philosophes*, who were acting in the interest of their party; for, with Voltaire, they had in their midst the banner which they had been forced to do without all their lives.

As Voltaire could not remain permanently at the house of Villette—it was very dark, so that he could not work at noon without artificial light—he resolved to buy himself a house in which he could install himself as he liked. In the vicinity a house with a wonderful garden was put up for sale; first he wanted to buy this from the Count d'Hérouville. When the plan failed to go through, he walked and rode all over the city to find another house. He then bought a house which belonged to Monsieur de Villerceaux, and he was so anxious to see him that he called on him at the house of a family where he was eating dinner.

Nevertheless Voltaire declared now that he would spend the next two months in Ferney, and the plan was apparently so serious that the Prince of Condé had to promise to expect him in Dijon and to have a room ready for him.

11

In the meantime, to the astonishment of all his friends, he showed such an apparently inexhaustible vitality that even Tronchin was impressed. In a let-

ter the latter writes: "Despite unbelievable fatigue, Voltaire is well. He wants to return to Ferney to regulate the various affairs of his colony, then come back to Paris to settle here; he has purchased a house; in all my life I have seen many crazy people, but none crazier than he. He apparently thinks he will live to be a hundred."

On April 6 Voltaire went on foot to the Academy. A poor woman who sold books at the entrance of the Tuileries ran over to him and said: "My good Monsieur de Voltaire, write me a few books which I can sell, and my fortune is made." The crowd which gathered around him called: 'This is Monsieur de Voltaire the defender of the unfortunate, who has freed the Calas and Sirven families."

Madame du Deffand wrote to Walpole: "On the streets the people follow him and call him *l'homme aux Calas*. The Court alone refuses to show enthusiasm. He is eighty-four years old and I almost believe that he cannot die. He has all his senses and none is weakened. He is a very strange individual and really of a superior kind."

Voltaire had to promise to visit the lodge of the "Nine Sisters." As the Freemasons regarded him in the light of a protector of the oppressed, without any oath of allegiance as a member of their lodge, they had resolved to give him a great reception and ceremony of homage when he called.

He was solemnly led into the lodge when he appeared, on April 7. He was seated at the side of the chairman and a laurel wreath was put on his head. In the speech which was made in his honor, there are these lines:

"We swear to help our brothers, but you have been the founder of a whole colony which adores you and which overflows with your benefactions. You have erected a church to Eternity; but, what is of greater value, you have made this church a refuge for men who have been exiled, but who were useful. Thus you, much beloved brother, have been a Freemason before you received the degree of a Freemason, and you have fulfilled the obligations of a Freemason before you promised us to keep them."

On April 11 he made his return visit to Madame du Deffand who, though a little offended because this visit had been postponed so long, as she told to her dear Walpole, received her old friend very nicely and did not reproach him in any way. He remained a whole hour and was "extremely pleasant." She wrote "if he comes to see me often, I will be very glad; if he stays away, I will know how to do without him. I neither hope for nor count upon him."

She did not see him again. Even this visit, however, gave her trouble. Her apartment was in the cloister of Saint-Joseph. The nuns learned that the pure air of the cloister had been desecrated by the presence of the most contemptible writer of France. When they heard, six weeks later, that her Godless guest had been refused a grave in consecrated soil, the nuns assembled with their pupils under the windows of Madame du Deffand and clamoring and caterwauling cried out that an inhabitant of these holy walls had opened her door to a degenerate and exiled man.

By chance Voltaire became acquainted during these last days with one member of the Royal Family. He was walking across the little garden in the Palais Royal to call upon the Countess de Blot, when he saw two little boys with their nurse maid. He asked who they were because he was struck by their remarkable resemblance to the Regent. One of them was the later King, Louis Philippe.

The nurse maid, who knew Voltaire, urged him to go in the house and to look at the two little Princesses who were sleeping. In the meantime, the Duchess had been informed that Monsieur de Voltaire was with her little children. She hurried over just as she was in petticoat and kimona, with flying hair and great enthusiasm for she was going to see for the first time a very famous man whose acquaintance she had long been anxious to make.

It is a strange thought that Voltaire, who was a young man when Louis XIV was on the throne, lived so long that he saw Louis Philippe, even though as a child.

12

Madame du Deffand was one of the friends of his youth who kept her mental faculties. The Countess of Ségur, whom he called upon, was fatally ill. She was depressed, but forgot her illness and age when the two fell to reminiscing.

Several days later he came back to her. As the Countess felt stronger, she turned the conversation to the question of his faith, requesting Voltaire to make his peace with the Church now that he was old, to repent whatever sins he had committed, and to promise penance and conversion. Thus she got him so upset that his eyes flashed and he forgot the proprieties. He even lost the moderation of expression which had always been a strong point. But here were a hundred and fifty people listening in open-mouthed amazement to Voltaire's words; so he restrained himself and shifted the subject to his old friend's health. He told her that he had felt as badly several years before, and that he had cured himself by a simple diet which consisted of the yolk of an egg beaten up with potato flour and water.

The next lady Voltaire visited was the Marquise Latour du Pin Gouvernet, formerly Suzanne de Livry, the sweetheart of his youth who had been unfaithful to him with his friend Genonville two generations ago. He crossed her doorstep with no little emotion.

Each sought in the other the lover held in memory all these years. There was still less left of the young Suzanne than of the young François, whose picture, painted by Largillière when he was twenty-four years old, hung on the wall. Nothing could have been sadder than this meeting.

13

While in Paris Voltaire was the object of passionate admiration. Versailles was steadily hostile to him. On April 12 a former Jesuit, the Abbé de Beauregard, preached in the palace chapel a sermon in

which he referred directly to Voltaire, even attacked the Chancellor for not interfering with him and for not forbidding the expressions of admiration.

The priest violently attacked the newer philosophers and condemned their horrible assertions. God, the King and morality were attacked in books which tore down every government and every faith, and which the Censor nevertheless carelessly ignored. Instead of the authors being punished as they deserved, they were crowned with wreaths. The King, to whom the Prince of Beauveau, Voltaire's only friend and defender at Court, complained about the sermon, said that the Abbé, though in perhaps slightly over violent language, had done no more than his duty. And the Chancellor revoked his order to the Censor to forbid any attacks on the old man from Ferney so long as he stayed in Paris.

On April 27 Voltaire went to a session of the Academy. The Abbé Delille read several fragments of his own work, and then a translation which he had made of some of Pope's Epistles. Voltaire, who recalled the original text, compared the translation with it, gave preference to several passages of his friend Delille, and spoke in general about the necessity of enlarging the French language by new words: "Our language," he said, "is a very poor but proud woman. We have to give her alms against her will."

And he, for instance, proposed to call an actor of tragic rôles a *tragedien*. Voltaire was the first to employ this now common expression.

But this led him to talk about the necessity of revising the dictionary of the Academy; he showed how this *Dictionnaire*, the elaboration of which from the beginning had been the main task of the Academy, was insufficient, dry, devoid of any broader viewpoint, without philosophy, a discredit to literature and to the Academy. The latter should set itself to create a new one as fast as possible. He spoke with a fire and eloquence which amazed everyone.

On May 7 he came with an entirely outlined plan for the dictionary. Every Academician, he said, should take one letter of the alphabet. He, for in-

stance, declared himself willing to take the letter "A" with which so many words commenced.

When he sat down after his detailed plan had been accepted by the Academy he said: "I thank you in the name of the alphabet." The Chevalier of Castellux answered politely for the Academy: "And we thank you in the name of literature."

14

Two days after the first visit to the Academie Française, on April 29, Voltaire attended a session in the Academie des Sciences. His presence was treated as a great event.

As it was known that he would attend, a crowd of ladies, writers and prominent people had flooded the session hall. He had scarcely appeared when everybody applauded wildly. Although he was not a member, the members at once gave him a seat among their own. Dr. Franklin, who was there, opened his arms and the two famous men embraced heartily.

On May 7, the same day on which he had spoken to the Academy about his new plan for a dictionary, he went, incognito, hidden in a little loge, to see *Alzire*. But when the actor Larive, at the end of the fourth act, thrilled the audience by his performance of Zamore, everybody, and Voltaire, too, exclaimed: "That was splendid!" He himself was greeted with ringing applause which lasted through the whole intermission, so that he was forced to rise and to thank the audience. The storm of applause was so terrific that Madame Vestris, who opened the fifth act, tried three or four times in vain to say her part. She was drowned out until by motions of his hand Voltaire thanked the public for their goodness and asked that the performance be allowed to go on undisturbed to its end. The yelling then stopped for a moment, but the public could not remain quiet on seeing Voltaire and during the entire fifth act the jubilation continued, while the actors, in the general enthusiasm and excitement, played as they had never played before.

On May 11 Voltaire felt unwell and took to bed. He had a fever. The Duke de Richelieu, who came regularly to see him, spoke to him about a narcotic which he himself used when he had an attack of rheumatism; he promised his old friend to share it with him "like a brother." As Voltaire suffered violent pains, he wrote that the agony was more than he could bear, and asked the Duke for the medicine; but the medicine turned out to have a bad effect. The two friends had not the same constitution. The feebleness of the patient alarmed those around him. He was as though broken and could not even be induced to take a little bouillon.

The parish priest of Saint-Sulpice came to the death-bed and pleaded passionately that the patient recognize the divinity of Jesus Christ. He answered only: "Just let me die in peace!"

Belle-et-Bonne remained at the bedside. She said to Lady Morgan: "All that has been said about Voltaire's fear and misgivings is invented by his enemies. Up to the last moment he showed the kindness which was part of his character; everything indicated quiet and peace, except for the little fit of impatience caused by the meddling of the parish priest."

On May 30, 1778, at eleven o'clock in the evening, Voltaire died.

15

On May 31 his old friend Madame du Deffand wrote her usual letter to Horace Walpole. The first twenty lines of the letter are concerned with the description of an illness which had a short while before overtaken her lackey Colman after a fall on the stairs.

"Whether or not he suffered also from rheumatism, he soon got pains in first one, then another place, and on the ninth day after his fall, day before yesterday, he died. It is a loss for me. He served me twenty-one years, and he was useful to me in various things. I miss him and his death is such a terrible event that it puts me in a very sad humor. And being sad, I did not think I would write you; this is why

you have had no answer to your letter of the 22nd. Yesterday I changed my mind, for I do not want to break up our interchange of thoughts, which is most soothing to me, and which is perhaps the only thing which makes my life bearable.

"I thank you for all the news you have sent me; I cannot reciprocate; it seems to me that I know still less than the newspapers; I take so little part in what happens that my ignorance is perhaps a result of my indifference. I know only that Maréchal of Broglie has command of the troops in Bretagne and Normandy and that his brother has been given a command, not with him, but in Metz.

"Everybody is going away, that is, all those who used to visit me.

"The Abbé Sigorgne is here and I hope that he will remain until August, etc. (she continues with thirteen more closely cramped lines of the same interest, then adds as a postscript:)

"It is true, I have forgotten something important. Voltaire has died . . . nobody knows what to do with the body. The parish priest of St.-Sulpice will not accept it. Will it be sent to Ferney? But he is under the ban of the Bishop of the diocese to which Ferney belongs. . . ."

Madame du Deffand, who called herself Voltaire's close friend, and who had corresponded with him for forty-six years, forgot his death the day after because of the loss of one of her useful lackeys, and over such news as the whereabouts of Maréchal of Broglie and the Abbé Sigorgne.

And while this friend was giving this information about his death, the clergy of Paris circulated the most terrible descriptions of Voltaire's fear of death, of his remorse, of his fear of the devil who had come to call for him.

16

His entourage had prepared for the difficulties which were bound to follow.

A nephew, the Abbé Mignot, had during the illness of Voltaire asked the priest of Saint-Sulpice if any

obstacles would be put in the way of a regular burial. The priest had answered that if Monsieur de Voltaire did not recant formally and publicly and in the greatest detail, he could not be buried in consecrated soil.

It was of no use that the Abbé objected that his uncle had made a written profession of faith and had denied various works which had been ascribed to him, that he had even written to him that if he had caused any anger that he asked for forgiveness.

The priest stuck to his guns; Voltaire was the declared opponent of religion; consequently he must make a recantation as striking as the scandal had been general.

Voltaire's two nephews, Abbé Mignot, who *Conseiller au grand Conseil,* and Dompierre d'Hornoy, called upon the minister of the Departément of Paris, and upon the police commissioner. But the Minister was content to consult the same priest of Saint-Sulpice, who in obedience to an order of the Archbishop answered the question of burial in the parish cemetery with an absolute refusal.

The Abbé did not care to risk a transportation of the body to Ferney, where Voltaire had chosen his bathroom as a grave. For it was almost certain that the same resistance would be met there. The Bishop of Annecy would not stop at any sensational action, and would show himself merciless.

It was decided that the Abbé Mignot should bury the deceased in his own Abbey Scellières, in the province Champagne.

In the night of May 30 and 31, the body was embalmed. In bathrobe and nightcap the small body was held under the arms and brought down to the waiting coach, where it was given to a servant and put in a position a sleeping man might assume.

A second coach followed with the few mourners, Dompierre d'Hornoy and his two cousins, Marchand de Varennes and Marchand de la Houlière, the former, the *maître d'hôtel du Roi,* the latter a brigadier-general of infantry. The Abbé Mignot had gone ahead to inform the Prior of Scellières of the death and explain to him the service asked of him.

It was thought that the body could remain for the

time being in Scellières, and could, from there, be taken to Ferney in accordance with the will. Now it was of importance to prevent any desecration of the body. It had been Voltaire's hope to escape being thrown into the carrion pit. One day he had said to Tronchin: "All I ask is loneliness and a grave. Will it be denied me?"

In order to reassure the Prior, Mignot showed him the permission of the parish priest to transport the body:

"I give permission for the remains of Monsieur de Voltaire to be removed without ceremony and renounce in this regard all churchly rights.

Paris May 30, 1778
S. de Tersac, priest of Saint-Sulpice."

He also produced the Minister's authorization to take the body to Ferney or anywhere else.

The priest wanted to show every courtesy to his superior. The burial took place in the cellar of the cloister. In the morning at five o'clock a Mass was read. To quiet the bigots it was said that the body was covered two feet deep with unslaked lime, which had consumed it without leaving a trace. The Archbishop had meanwhile written to the Bishop of Troyes to prevent the burial, but the relatives of the dead man had worked in such haste that the prohibition came too late.

The Prior excused himself to his ecclesiastical superior by saying that even the excommunicated were not refused a grave, and Voltaire was not excommunicated. It did not help. He was dismissed. The Abbé Mignot remained unpunished for the sole reason that he was not only Abbé but also *Conseiller au grand Conseil.*

17

The unprincipled Ministry, who stood between the embitterment of the encyclopedists and of the pious, forbade the newspapers to write about Voltaire. They were not to say anything, either good or bad, about

him. The *Journal de Paris* which published all death notices was ordered not to report this one. The actors received from Court an express order prohibiting the performance of any play by the poet. A prohibition whose execution proved impossible as his plays were the main part of the repertory.

The Academy ordered Voltaire a Mass by the Franciscans. The Abbé, however, had forbidden the monks to sing this Mass without his orders; they, therefore, answered that they could do nothing until they obtained the permission of the authorities. D'Alembert approached a member of the Academy, Prince Louis de Rohan, who had great influence with the Clergy and who as a Cardinal and lover of literature seemed suited to be of help to his colleague. The Prelate answered with the assurance of his good will, and the advice to postpone the matter in order to smooth the way as much as possible.

D'Alembert wrote to Frederick:

"The Academy has so far not yet held the Mass for Voltaire which it always holds for one whom it loses, and, despite all petitions, the permit may never be obtained. The refusal is a new insult to the man we miss. By the way, all writers give him the deserved consolation, that none applies for the vacant seat as his successor, and it is believed that the election will not take place very soon. It should never take place. If all felt as I do, the seat would remain vacant."

Frederick succeeded in fulfilling d'Alembert's request to have a Mass read in the Catholic church in Berlin.

18

Voltaire's family was forbidden to have a simple monument erected in the little country church in which he was buried. Mignot had ordered one from the sculptor Claudion. It was to stand on the bare uninscribed grave-stone; but Mignot had to abandon this plan.

Madame Denis gave the portrait of Voltaire which the Marquise of Gouvernet had returned to the Acad-

emy, which received it "with gratitude and mourning."

The Academy wanted to have another portrait painted from Houdon's bust, and these two pictures, painted sixty years apart, were to hang in the session hall of the Academy. But instead Houdon himself donated the terra cotta bust.

Catherine wanted to possess Voltaire's library, with his numerous margined comments in the books; also the manuscripts and original letters, and of course she permitted his heirs to take copies of every document. The library was small, altogether 6200 volumes. For, Voltaire was not a bibliophile; he used the books only as tools; he found most of them too long-winded, and often tore out the twenty or thirty sheets that he considered valuable, from a book of many hundred pages; he had these stitched and threw the rest away. Catherine was so generous as to give Madame Denis 135,000 livres and a great number of precious gifts, for these books. She wrote her a letter in which she thanked her for her kindness: "I am very much impressed by the attention and faith you have shown me; I am flattered very much that this seems to be hereditary in the family." Madame Denis could never be induced to go back to Ferney where the good people to whom Voltaire had given sanctuary in his colony were now entirely dependent on her. She unfeelingly sold Ferney for 230,000 livres to Villette, who without knowledge of Voltaire's nephews had taken the deceased's heart, and who now gave it a place in the former bedroom of the poet, in a silver gilded box which stood in a pyramid which rested on an altar.

19

It had been forbidden to erect him a monument of marble or bronze. But the question was to erect a different sort of monument, more lasting than any of stone or marble, an edition of the numerous anonymous, pseudonymous works which had always been denied by their author.

The publisher Pancoucke who had visited Voltaire in Ferney, together with his sister, Madame Suard, resolved to publish the collected works of the great writer. He wished first to gather all the material. Madame Denis let him have two boxes full of papers and manuscripts. These were collections of earlier published material.

Of real value were the thousands of Voltaire's letters. But the ladies and gentlemen of the Court who possessed them in great numbers would not let go of them. Pancoucke saw obstacles of every sort, also persecution ahead of him.

So Beaumarchais, who had more courage, bought these papers and the copyright from Pancoucke for 160,000 livres. Although Beaumarchais had the promise of secret protection from Maurepas, he very cautiously had the printing started in Kehl in Baden. Voltaire's works were not permitted to be printed on French soil.

The publication of Voltaire's writings met with no difficulties on the other side of the Rhine; the difficulty was to get the books over the bridge of Kehl into France.

The prospectus appeared in 1781; it was a small volume in itself. But the clergy watched. In the same year Beaumarchais thought of producing Voltaire's *Samson* which he had read. But he had to give this up. In the same way the Voltaire edition met with every possible obstacle. The Bishop of Amiens issued a thundering manifesto in which, however, he was clumsy enough to refer to the case of Chevalier de La Barre. The Archbishop of Vienne issued a circular to his parish telling them that they could not subscribe to such pernicious productions without committing a mortal sin.

Frederick the Great, who had expressed his joy at the undertaking and wished him luck, was deeply hurt by a passage in Voltaire's writing which the latter had never published and never meant to publish.

Voltaire, in 1759—still smarting from the humiliating scene in Frankfort—had written the *Mémoires pour servir à la vie de Monsieur de Voltaire* in which Frederick is desribed coolly but without belittling

comment, in which, however, his sexual abnormality was described in eleven lines which, true or not true, could not have failed to insult him very deeply if he were ever to see them.

As was his habit, Voltaire had locked away his manuscripts but as we have seen, he was very careless in guarding his manuscripts; now and then he left the key in the lock of his manuscript cupboard as well as in his money-chest. Anybody could take copies without his knowledge.

When he had made it up with the King of Prussia, and after the two old friends had resumed their correspondence, Voltaire threw this manuscript in the fire. He had not thought of the fact that Wagnière had made two copies. But when it was found that La Harpe, in 1768, had taken possession of one of these copies, he was sent away from Ferney, and as Madame Denis had been his conspirator, she also was expelled and only much later received permission to return. After Voltaire's death, one copy came into the possession of Catherine, while Madame Denis who ever since the adventure in Frankfort, hated the King of Prussia, gave permission to Beaumarchais to include these memoirs in Voltaire's collected writings.

Beaumarchais, with his business sense, had a feeling that these indiscretions could bring him a fortune. He read them to an intimate circle of friends and they became known. The government felt that their publication would cause diplomatic difficulties with Prussia, and consequently the Minister, Monsieur de Vergenne, ordered Beaumarchais to leave them unprinted. They appeared not until 1790 in the last volume of the Kehl edition when Frederick had been dead four years.

But as early as 1784, the memoirs, taken from one stolen copy or another, were in wide circulation in Paris and the Prussian ambassador, Baron von Goltz, tried to stop the sale in vain. There can be no doubt that Frederick saw them during his last days, and that he felt that the man to whom he had been so close and who until his death had kept his friendship, after his death took unworthy revenge for the long-settled incident, more than a generation previous.

He never mentioned these memoirs. But he also never wanted to see Voltaire's bust which he had ordered from Houdon.

20

The Kehl edition ruined Beaumarchais financially. He had counted especially upon the correspondence as an attraction for the public, and especially the correspondence with rulers. No protest was expected from Russia or Prussia. But when he came to print Catherine's letters, the Empress hesitated. She did not want Voltaire's readers to know anything more about herself than what she believed to be harmless. Grimm, as her representative, had to request a copy with every other sheet a blank one so that Catherine could cut or add as she pleased. She trimmed and changed and enlarged the poor letters so much that the expenses for the reprint rose immensely. Beaumarchais had been promised that Russia would pay the unforeseen expenses. But the promise was forgotten.

In hope of a large sale, 15,000 copies had been printed; the number of subscribers, however, was only 2000. Three years passed before the first volume was ready for distribution. They came out in 1783. In 1785 no more than 30 volumes had been published.

Now the persecutions began. The Archbishop of Paris denounced the edition in a public notice. An order of the Conseil of June 3, 1785, forbade the sale. Hundreds of volumes had therefore to be smuggled into France. The government wanted to stop the subscription and issued an edict prohibiting the journalists to discuss the work or make the slightest reference to it. Beaumarchais suffered a loss of one million francs.

In August, 1792, Parisians, who had been talked into believing that Beaumarchais had transformed his house in the Boulevard Saint-Antoine into an arsenal, had forced their way in to take into their possession the cannons and guns; they found, however, nothing but the loose, plainly printed, unsold

sheets of the *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire,* a mountain of paper.

There appeared between 1817 and 1829 no less than twelve different editions of Voltaire's collected works. From 1817 to 1824, a single publisher sold 1,590,000 volumes; during the next five years an equal number were published which makes 3,000,000 volumes for a period of twelve years.

Since then the editions, ever enlarged, have appeared in great numbers.

XVI

APOTHEOSIS

1

VOLTAIRE, conservative as he was in some respects, had done more than any other philosopher to pave the way for the Revolution.

Therefore of the thinkers of the eighteenth century, he was honored as first by the Revolution. In 1791 the National Assembly resolved, on the anniversary of his death, May 30, to bestow upon him the greatest honor with which it could distinguish a dead man.

Voltaire's body was to be removed from the Abbey in Champagne where it had been taken at night in a cart, to the Panthéon in Paris.

The Marquis de Villette, who during the Revolution had changed into a simple man of the people, plain Charles Villette, and who had become a zealous journalist of the advance guard of the Revolution, still lived in the house in the rue de Beaune. Right next to it the monks of the Theatine order had erected a big apartment house, and they were angry because one of their tenants, an engraver, had an inscription carved in the stone above his shop: *"Au grand Voltaire."* Now Villette proposed to turn "Quai des Theatins" into "Quai Voltaire." In 1791 he succeeded in this. The new name of the street was to be carved in stones from the Bastille, in which Voltaire himself had been imprisoned.

The resolution which had been passed in the National Assembly was an outgrowth of the earlier resolution that all ecclesiastical estates should be confiscated and sold, the abbey Scellières among the rest. But who then should get Voltaire's remains?

The proposition was made that the coffin be brought to Paris and buried at the foot of the monument of Henry IV, near the King whom Voltaire had glorified and whose glory he had created.

But Camille Desmoulins had this compared to erecting an image of the Eternal at the foot of St.-Crépin (a comic figure of the theater). No, a temple must be erected to Voltaire.

On November 17, 1790, the Théâtre Français had again performed Voltaire's *Brutus*. The play was given amid immense excitement. When Mirabeau entered he was greeted with the call "Brutus!" The first act, which was short, took up an hour, for every line became a pretext for a demonstration. In addition to this there was an attempt to make up for the ringing applause for the republicans on the stage by calling now and then *"Vive le Roi!"* The lines

> Mais je te verrai vaincre ou mourrai comme toi,
> Vengeur du nom romain, libre encore, et sans roi,

called forth one single cheer for the King.

2

The inhabitants of the community of Romilly, however, wished to keep the body. Finally they asked to be permitted to keep the head and the right arm. But this had too much of Roman Catholicism in it, reminiscent of Saint's bones and relics.

Despite this the heel bone of one foot was stolen by an admirer. Dr. Bouquet who had been present when the body was exposed gave the middle part of the foot to the museum in Troyes. Otherwise the body was unharmed. An oak wreath was put around his head and the body was put in a sarcophagus.

On the way from Scellières to Romilly, the procession passed through rows of people who everywhere held fresh green branches or cypress branches. Flowers were thrown on the cloth which covered the coffin. Women held their children up and let them kiss the sarcophagus.

Strangely enough, an attack was feared, and it was made known that it would have to break the resistance of 2000 poor people before it could take this precious body away from the procession.

Voltaire's opponents in Paris said that the transfer

of the body to the capital would cost 300,000 livres. Villette pledged the friends of the deceased to take all expense upon themselves, so that the city of Paris would have not more to pay than 18,000 livres, while at least 18,000 visitors would flood the city to attend the ceremonies and would probably spend 80,000 livres.

By a strange chance Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were brought back from Varennes to Paris as captives by a hostile crowd, King and Queen in name only, just at the time when Voltaire, "King Voltaire," returned to the capital, dead but immortal, triumphant, glorified and revenged against the arbitrary authorities as well as against the priests who had abused their power.

3

All authorities of the Seine Valley had come out and surrounded the coach which was covered with wreaths and loose flowers. When, on July 9, a letter from the Department informed the National Assembly that the procession was coming near and would arrive on Sunday, *le procureur-syndic* and the mayor went to meet it, the former to the border of the Département, the latter to the city limits of Paris. On July 11, at ten o'clock in the morning, the procession passed the walls of the city. A squadron of cavalry led, then the infantry; then came the triumphal coach, with wheels of bronze. The coach was decorated with garlands, cypress and crepe. After it followed the authorities. They all wanted to celebrate one of the greatest minds, as in former times homage had been paid to a ruler. They wanted to show their gratitude to him for freeing thought, making possible political liberty, and leading the resistance against the Church, and the obsolete criminal laws.

Where once had stood the Bastille in which Voltaire had been imprisoned, a structure had been erected. There the coffin was set down amid general rejoicing. Flowers covered the earth. Stones which

had been part of the Bastille had been used to form a base on which allegories and inscriptions were written.

A great procession arrived, writers, engineers, drummers, gunners, a battalion of children, deputations from the various schools, societies with their flags.

The laborers who had torn down the Bastille carried chains, cannon balls, cuirasses, as a sign of the victory. A citizen dressed as an "Amazon," one of the heroines of the siege of the Bastille, carried a relief showing the wrecking of the state prison; citizens from the quarter of Saint-Antoine accompanied her, carrying the tri-colored flag. The Gardes Français carried a model of the Bastille. Then followed the voters of 1789 and 1790, then the Swiss Guard, deputations from the theaters of France; and then Voltaire's gilded statue which was wreathed with laurel and next followed the members of the Academy, and then France's writers who surrounded a wonderful casket containing the seventy volumes of the collected works of Voltaire which Beaumarchais had donated to the Département.

A great band preceded the coach, which was drawn by twelve white horses four abreast. They were led by grooms in Roman costume. The sarcophagus was of porphyry, and rose three steps above the coach. On the cover was carved a couch on which Voltaire lay as if asleep. By his side lay a broken lyre, and the genii of immortality held a wreath of stars about his head. Four stage masques decorated the corners of the coach, and four mourning genii holding torches decorated the sides. The inscription on the front of the sarcophagus read: *He revenged Calas, La Barre, Sirven and Montbailli. As a poet, thinker, and historian, he gave mankind the greatest gifts. He has prepared us for liberty.*

Somewhat more sophisticated was the use of two verses of Voltaire on the sides of the sarcophagus. On the one side:

Si l'homme est créé libre, il doit se gouverner.

On the other:

Si l'homme a des tyrans, il doit les détrôner.

Behind the sarcophagus marched a deputation of the National Assembly, next came representatives of the Départements, the Supreme Court, the Judges of the Courts of Paris. A battalion of veterans concluded the procession.

4

The procession passed along the Boulevards to the Opera. Voltaire's bust had been placed outside the building. Three medallions encircled by flower garlands bore the names of three works, *Pandora, Le Temple de la Gloire* and *Samson.* At the entrance waited the singers of the opera. They sang a hymn in his honor. Chéron stepped forth with a laurel wreath, and Ponteuil kissed the statue in an outburst of enthusiasm which was shared by the other artists and by the crowd.

The cortege proceeded to the Place Louis Quinze and then to the Tuileries. All windows in the palace were occupied by the King's household and the servants, with the exception of one window, the curtains of which were drawn. Behind them sat the King and the Queen, who had been brought back by force from their flight, and who were alarmed at the sight of this honor to a simple citizen whom France's Kings had attempted to suppress by all means in their power. The contrast was startling between the genius which reigned over these crowds, and the two crowned heads of the overthrown monarchy, who huddled behind drawn curtains.

Villette, who had never tired of calling himself a relative of Voltaire's, and who liked to remind people that he was in possession of Voltaire's heart, had on his house, the last residence of Voltaire, installed the inscription:

Son esprit est partout, et son cœur est ici.

A woman from the lower classes who failed to understand these words, explained the inscription thus: *Eh, son cœur, c'est Madame de Villette.*

On the other side of the house was a big amphitheater which was filled with pretty women and young girls in white dresses, with wreaths of roses on their heads. As soon as the coach came in sight they began to strew flowers. When Houdon's statue arrived opposite the amphitheater and was put in place under an arch of branches, they stopped.

Madame de Villette came out of the house and was carried to the statue of her foster father. With tears in her eyes she bent over and kissed the statue, while the vast crowds burst into applause. Then she led her little daughter up to Voltaire, which, according to tradition of the time, meant that she was dedicating the child to reason and freedom.

The funeral march ended and a triumphal song began, with words by Chénier. An orchestra of antique instruments made after those on the column of Trajon played the accompaniment.

Reine de Villette, with her daughter and the two mademoiselles Calas, took their seats in front of the catafalque. A group of young women followed it.

In front of the old Théâtre Français, where Voltaire's first tragedy had been played, they stopped again. The façade was covered with a great painting, showing Voltaire's bust as two genii, one on each side, wreathed it with oak leaves. The inscription read:

At the age of seventeen years he wrote *Oedipe.*

Then they came to the Odéon Théâtre. Garlands were hanging on columns. Thirty-two medallions bore the names of the best works of Voltaire. The following inscription could be read:

At the age of eighty he wrote *Irène.*

5

One night in May, 1814, Voltaire's bones were removed from the lead coffin in the Pantheon and thrown into a sack by a number of young reactionary fanatics led by the director of the mint, Monsieur de

Puymorin. The sack was put into a coach which was waiting behind the church. In the dark of the night and by unfrequented streets they rode to the Barrière de la Gare, where there was a dumping ground. Other members of the conspiracy who were waiting had dug a deep hole in which the remains disappeared without a trace forever.

There is a funny little globe whose inhabitants poison their wise men and their saviors, burn their heroes and thinkers, chain their liberators, set them free again, acclaim them after their death, and then hide them in a hole as one would hide dirt or a treasure.

The giant from Sirius discovered this little globe and found it inhabited by a mob of absurdly small creatures, most of whom were engaged in making life difficult for their fellows, and exterminating each other. He did not fail to recognize their many pleasant and worthy qualities. He saw that now and then they helped each other.

But he marvelled at their tendency to misunderstand their greatest members and to mistreat them. Those who drew those humble creatures from the mire of stupidity in which they had lost themselves, were the very ones whom they liked best to pull down and drown in this same mud. Then to the same persons they erected statues, first of wood or limestone, later of gold or ebony, finally of marble or bronze. After this was done they liked to throw dirt at the statues, wash them off afterward, slander them once again and only after a long time let them come out in their true form and color.

THE END

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[*Words in italics denote titles of books*]

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